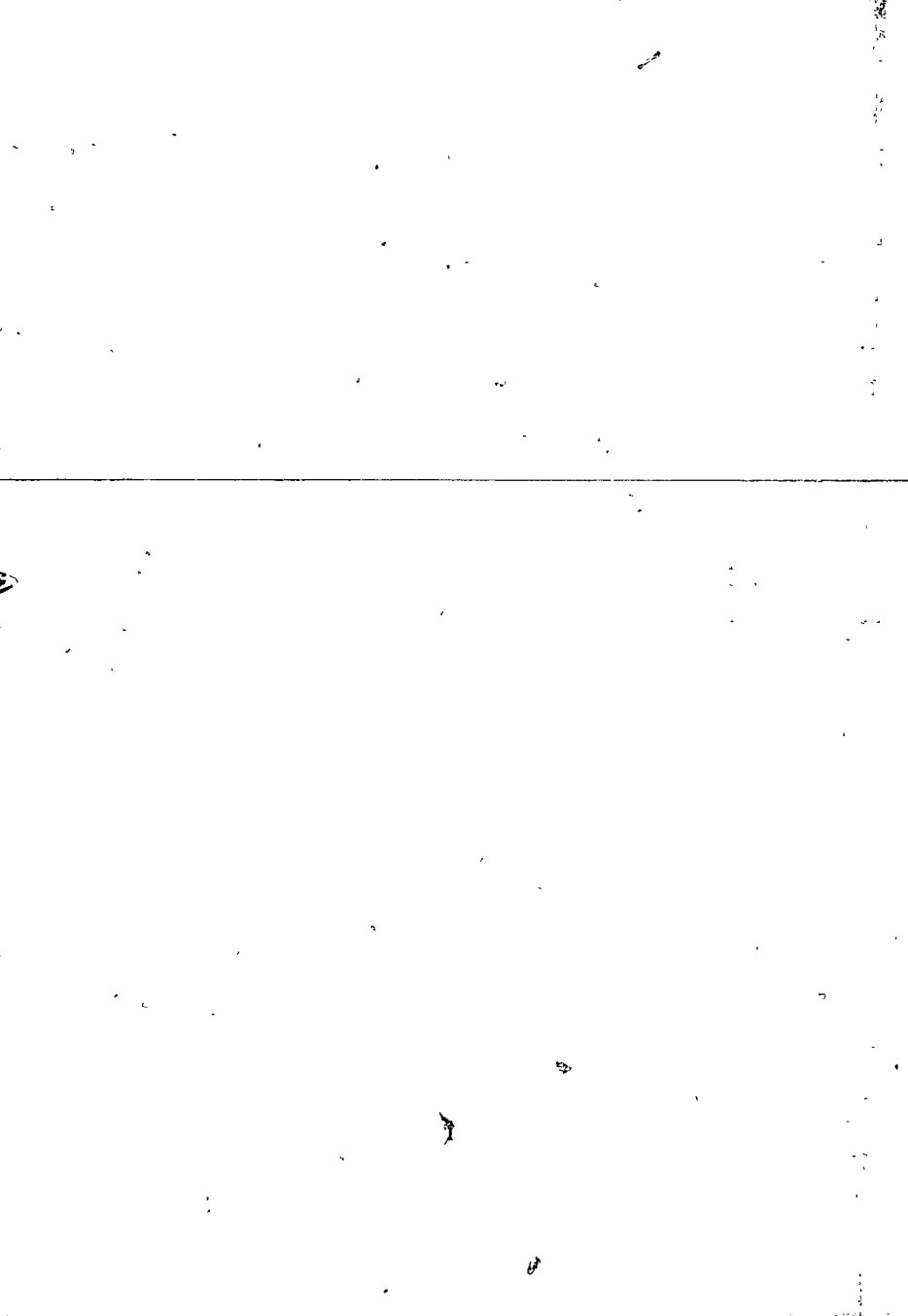


THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS



THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

by
DOUGLAS CAREY

"Perfect love casteth out fear"



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
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I

Chapter		Page
I	MOATLANDS PARK	9
II	SIR PHILIP AND MILDRED	15
III	MILDRED'S REQUEST	30
IV	MOTHER HAGGERTY	35
V	"YOUR SON OR MINE"	45
VI	THE HONOURABLE CLIVE AND MARIE	53
VII	MARIE VISITS HAGGERTY	59
VIII	THE CORONER'S QUANDARY	69
IX	HAGGERTY DEFIES RICHARD PARKINSON	76
X	PARKINSON ACCUSES HIS WIFE OF INFIDEL- ITY	90
XI	SUSPENDED ANIMATION	104
XII	THE MELTING ICON AND THE FIRST FEATHER	115
XIII	WHAT MIRANDA REVEALED	125
XIV	AN ORCHID AND A WAGER	142
XV	CRAWFORD AND WILSON SAIL FOR INDIA	152
XVI	SIR PHILIP AND BABY EVELYN	162
XVII	THE SECOND FEATHER	178

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART II

Chapter	Page
XVIII VYVYAN MEETS EVELYN PARKINSON	196
XIX THE ORCHID OF DEATH	213
XX THE REAL SHADAKHARI CORROBORATES CRAWFORD'S FEARS	230
XXI THE THIRD FEATHER	239
XXII EVELYN SURPRISES VYVYAN	255
XXIII THE NEW MENACE	263
XXIV MIRANDA MAKES FURTHER DISCLOSURES ..	278
XXV EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE	288
XXVI HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND	306
XXVII CONCLUSION	319

THE END

THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

PART I
CHAPTER I

MOATLANDS PARK

THE morning sun was shining brightly on leaves which were slightly Autumn tinted as two riders met near the shore of the lake three hundred yards inside the southern lodge gates of Moatlands Park. It was a glorious morning, with scarcely any sounds breaking the stillness, except such as were caused by contented Nature—crows and ravens chattering amicably in the trees overhead; waterfowl gobbling their peaceful matins upon the water, which was unruffled by even the faintest breeze; with here and there the blowing of a giant carp—a noise not unlike the staccato croaking of a bull frog—as he thrust his snout above the surface.

Beyond the fact that they were brothers, there was very little similarity between the riders. Richard Parkinson, owner of Moatlands Park, and hereditary Lord of the Manor, carried himself with an austerity which he felt becoming to his dignified position. He was Conservative to the core of his nature. He held offices which had come to him almost in hereditary succession, including his seat in the House of Commons, to which no one opposed his right. He was also Chairman of the County Bench of Magis-

trates. Outside of his political and magisterial interests, he had one great obsession. That was the cultivation of orchids.

As a true son of the house, the fundamental principles of Richard Parkinson's existence were the same as those of his forebears. He had married, at the age of thirty, the daughter of a northern squire with pedigree as solid as his own. His bride elect had been chosen for him by his father, and he had carried out his father's wishes without pausing to consult his own sentiments. As a matter of fact, sentiment was a factor which had been missing in the Parkinson lineage for generations, except for a parental worship on the one hand, and a posterity worship on the other, either of which might have superseded the worship of a totem believer. Perhaps the only reason that a Lady of the Manor was selected at all, was that she might consummate the traditions of the family by presenting to the House of Parkinson a first-born son. That accomplished, it was a trait of the Parkinson character to relegate her to a regal position among the other chattels of her lord and master.

Richard's wife had failed in the great essential, the only saving feature being that she had not made matters worse by presenting her husband with a daughter. After ten years of waiting they were still childless. At first Richard had blamed her for his failure to propagate the race; recently he had begun to attribute that failure to another source which will be mentioned later.

His disappointment had aged him considerably and that fact accounted for the great disparity apparent between him

and his brother, Sir Philip Parkinson. In reality, Sir Philip was his junior by only two years. A casual observer might have imagined the difference to be nearer twenty.

Being a younger son of the Parkinsons, Sir Philip had no voice in the management of the estate, which, comprising practically a third of the whole County of Hertfordshire, was entailed in the direct line. He had inherited a considerable fortune from his mother, however, but shortly after Richard's marriage he had entered the Diplomatic Service, spending a number of years with the Embassy at St. Petersburg. There he had so distinguished himself that, on retiring from the post, he had been honored with a knighthood in recognition of his services. He was now maintaining a luxurious bachelor apartment in Westbourne Grove, in the heart of fashionable London.

He had not the Squire's stocky build, being much slighter, and of more aesthetic appearance. His dress was different to that of his brother. He adhered to that assumed by riders in Rotton Row, the cantering ground of the ultra-smart set of London Society. Richard, on the other hand, wore the heavy tweed coat and vest, and coarse Bedford cord breeches of the typical country squire, a habit he sported on all occasions, even such as the present, when he was journeying to Waltham Cross to listen to an important criminal case.

It was almost a year since Sir Philip had visited the family seat and there was a trace of rebuke in Richard's greeting.

"Your visits are so infrequent, Philip, I regret having to leave home on the day you do come," he said.

"As we disagree on matters that are vital to both of us. I have felt it better to stay away," Sir Philip replied. "There is less danger of our quarreling. Until now I had no pressing occasion to render homage at the family court."

A shade of annoyance passed over Richard's face. He liked to exact homage, but disliked to be reminded of the fact.

"I know, Philip," he said, "that family obligations bear little weight with you. You will be a comparative stranger when you are called upon to assume control of the estate."

"That, I sincerely hope, is a contingency which will never occur," Sir Philip returned quickly.

"In the event of my death . . ."

"You will have children to succeed you, in spite of your pessimism."

"Call it what you will, I am sure that Mildred will never give me a son," Richard said bitterly.

"I think you blame her unjustly," Sir Philip replied. He was unaware of the extent of the Squire's other morbid beliefs.

"I don't blame her," Richard retorted. "It's that infernal creature Haggerty!"

Sir Philip regarded him in amazement. "Richard!" he expostulated.

"Every word of her cursed predictions is coming true."

"Nonsense! You aroused her animosity, and she traded upon something that was apparent. Her predictions were but a feeble attempt to retaliate because you tried to secure her conviction on a charge of which the jury found her inno-

cent. She is a charlatan, affecting to read the stars. Beyond that she is an ignorant gypsy. You could hardly expect her to prophesy good for you when you were eager to hound her to the gallows."

"You are using strong language, Philip," Richard protested. "As a magistrate I had a duty to perform."

"Judge Worthington was satisfied with the verdict of the jury, Richard."

"Then can you explain why I have begun to feel her curse so persistently?" Richard demanded.

"I won't pretend to," Sir Philip answered. "I know she prophesied that the name of Parkinson would die. If you believe that, of what advantage would it be for me to fall in with your wishes, and marry?"

"They are not my wishes," Richard returned. "Your duty to your family . . ."

"I have other duties, too," Sir Philip interrupted him. "Right now I am considering the offer of an appointment in Buda-Pesth. It is on account of the unrest in the Balkans. I may later be called upon to undertake a commission in the negotiations between Russia and Turkey, where my knowledge of the dialects will be of great assistance."

"It requires discussion," Richard said abruptly. It was evident he did not approve. He asked: "When does Whitehall expect your answer?"

"Tomorrow morning. If you like I'll ride with you."

"I shall have to ride too quickly to talk," Richard replied, explaining where he was going. "Can you not fill in the day here? I shall be back to dinner this evening. Mildred

has often expressed surprise that you have not called. You may be able to amuse her. If you get tired of each other's company, Wilson is potting some new orchids from Brazil, and I should appreciate your opinion of them. You will stay?"

Sir Philip acquiesced somewhat grudgingly.

CHAPTER II

SIR PHILIP AND MILDRED

MOATLANDS PARK had changed but little during the three hundred and fifty years since it had been established. Trees had grown older; some had suffered the effects of time; but woodsman had never touched the densely-timbered copses, or the isolated clumps of elm and oak, many of which now defied the ravages of storm and tempest with the aid of their bowels of cement and their supports of steel.

The Manor, with its three thousand acres of parkland, comprises one of the picturesque homes of England of the Elizabethan period. Indeed, it is said that, when it was first established, the Virgin Queen herself loved to travel north from London with her brilliant train of courtiers to hunt the fox with the Moatlands Park pack. The house, a red-brick, castellated structure, is situated on an eminence overlooking the lake, about half a mile from the spot where Sir Philip had encountered his brother.

Sir Philip, however, did not proceed directly towards it, but turned his mount through the trees, riding at a slow pace along a path which would retard his arrival perhaps half an hour. This unexpected absence of his brother placed him in

16 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

an awkward predicament, adding perplexity to an already difficult position.

That difficulty had no connection with the appointment in the Near East. He had already decided to accept it, the proposed discussion with the Head of the House being but a relic of a sort of feudal obligation to which he as a Parkinson felt constrained to submit.

Years before, submission to that same ideal of feudal obligation had wrecked his life, dealing him a blow from which he had never recovered. He had never seen Mildred until she became Richard's affianced bride. Then, as if he alone in that family of stulted affections had the power to love with anything approaching passion, he had fallen desperately in love with her. Loyalty to Richard alone had kept him silent. He had permitted her to marry Richard without speaking, and cursed his self-abnegation for ever afterwards.

He had never been a frequent visitor at the Manor, but, until a year ago, he had never disclosed his feelings to Mildred. Then, entering unannounced, he had come upon her while she was crushed under some of Richard's scarcely-veiled sarcasm, and had listened to her grief. Unable to control himself, he had taken her in his arms and tried to soothe her tears with passionate kisses, murmuring: "Let me take you away, dear heart! I love you to distraction!"

"Phil! How dare you?" she had exclaimed, breaking away from his embrace.

"I would die for you," he told her.

"Don't, Phil!" she moaned. "I love . . . only Richard. If you would die for me, so would I die for him, but more readily give my life that his wishes might be gratified. It is entirely my fault that this has happened, but please . . . please, Phil, never speak of it again!"

Then she had left him. He had sought to obliterate the memory of that evening by careless participation in the pleasures that society afforded, and by absenting himself altogether from Moatlands Park.

By the time he reached the house he had regained his composure, but he did not immediately announce his arrival. There was that other alternative, Wilson and the orchids, so he rode round to the stables, handed his horse over to a groom, and went to find Wilson.

Though the topography of the park had not been changed, there were several additions to the original Manor. The orchid house, built as an annex, and commonly called the fernery, occupied the western half of the house on the south side, with a direct entrance from the library. There were other structures of glass along the western side as far as the Western Court, where some half dozen peafowl strutted in lordly dignity, and to which entrance could be obtained only through the extensive rose gardens, for which Moatlands Park was equally famous. Beyond these structures again, and in a direct line with the orchid house, was the vineyard, a long crystal structure in which were vines as old as the house itself, and on which grew clusters of purple grapes equal in size, and in similar profusion, to those produced by the world-famous Hampton Court Vines. On the

eastern side of the house, leading from the Marble Court, were the kitchen gardens, screened from view by thick rows of cypress, and intersected transversely at different points by hedges of box and privet.

Wilson, though but a young man in his early twenties, was a graduate of the County Horticultural College, and head gardener at the Manor. His special office was the care of the orchids. As Sir Philip expected, he found him occupied with the new consignment of South American plants.

Sir Philip picked up one or two roots to examine them as he remarked: "I haven't seen you to congratulate you on your successes last year, Wilson."

"We didn't do badly, sir," Wilson replied. "We got the Society Gold Medal for the second year in succession, and first prize at the Exhibition for hybrid *Odontoglossi*."

"What about the Claverton Prize for hybrids? You haven't beaten Lord Sherbrooke yet, I understand."

"The Squire hopes to with some of these, Sir Philip. I am rather keen on winning it myself, too."

"Why? Any particular reason?"

"The Squire has promised me half of the thousand guineas if we win it next year," Wilson answered with enthusiasm.

"What would you do with five hundred guineas?" Sir Philip asked him. "Are you thinking of getting married?"

"I have ambitions that way, sir."

"Yes, the head gardener's cottage has been vacant long

enough," Sir Philip said agreeably. "Who is the lady, may I ask?"

"You may, sir. She is my lady's maid, Marie," Wilson confessed, adding: "But nothing is settled yet, sir."

"I shouldn't think Marie would have any objections," Sir Philip observed. "You have a good enough position here."

"It would be difficult to find a better one," Wilson concurred readily. "Marie thinks that too, I believe, but it takes a lot to satisfy a woman. She says she would not listen to any man unless he had at least £1000 in the bank."

"Evidently she has ambitions as well," Sir Philip laughed. "Win the Claverton Prize, Wilson, and we'll see if anything can be done to make up the deficiency in your account."

"Thank you, sir. It's awfully good of you," Wilson said gladly. "If I may say it, sir, we would all like to see you happily settled yourself."

Sir Philip started. "I'm afraid you'll be disappointed in that," he said then, with a laugh which did not remove all trace of annoyance from his voice. "I am a confirmed bachelor, Wilson."

Without another word he passed through the adjoining palm houses towards the rose gardens, in which direction he had observed Mrs. Parkinson walking.

As was natural, there was considerable gossip in the servants' hall concerning family affairs, and Sir Philip came in for his full share. The Squire being without an heir, it was commonly surmised that Sir Philip would one day be

Lord of the Manor, especially as he carried his years so much better than his brother.

As a consequence, his failure to marry gave rise to many rumors, the most persistent of which had it that he had been seriously crossed in love years before. This rumor appealed strongly to Wilson's imagination now as he watched Sir Philip's progress towards the Western Court, and he felt annoyed with himself for probing thoughtlessly into an incurable wound. And, as one reflection will lead to another, so Wilson became moody as he proceeded with the potting of the orchids. He was very much in love with Marie, but was not so sure that she reciprocated his love. Although she had made the statement he attributed to her, he was obliged to admit that his advances had not always been as favourably received as he might have wished.

However, as we are not further concerned with his aspirations at the moment, we will return to Sir Philip.

Mildred had penetrated the rose gardens some distance before he overtook her. She was walking towards an arbour at the end of the gardens—a bower of clematis and Wilkinson's Pride, surrounded by the flowers she loved best of all, and situated at the extremity of an avenue of late-flowering damask and perennial tea roses. This was her favourite haunt when alone. Its remoteness from the house, and the quietude of its surroundings, appealed to her, and she would often come here for hours at a stretch, dividing her time between her fancy work and her meditations. Today, as usual, Marie had preceded her with a basket of embroideries, to arrange cushions for her mistress's comfort.

Being aware of this routine, Sir Philip would have loitered until she had dismissed Marie. But Mildred had heard his footsteps on the graveled path, and, turning to see who was following her into her holy of holies, she awaited him with a smile of welcome.

She gave him her hand, saying: "After such a long absence, Philip, I am more than pleased to see you."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mildred," he replied. "My only excuse . . ."

"Don't make excuses, Phil," she interrupted him, with a forced display of levity. "I am genuinely angry with you for treating us worse than friends. Are you not ashamed, sir, for neglecting me like this?"

It was not easy for Sir Philip to answer. It was simpler to mention that Marie was approaching them.

"Wait until she has gone then," Mildred said. "The delay may give you time to concoct the apology I am expecting."

Marie was a French maid—piquante, charming, and decidedly coquettish. It struck Sir Philip, as he watched her quick approach, that Wilson was building his hopes upon an exceedingly volatile foundation. He observed the intriguing glance with which she favoured him, and the inconsequential shrug of her shoulder as he merely nodded in return to her greeting: "*Bon jour, Sir Pheeleep!*" To her mistress she said: "*Tout est prêt, Madame. Est-ce que Madame désire autre chose?*"

"No, I think not," Mildred said, almost curtly. "Tell Greenfield that Sir Philip will be staying to lunch."

„Certainement, Madame. Madame n'oublie pas que c'est mon jour de congé?"

"No, I do not forget. I shall not need you any more until this evening."

"Je vous remercie, Madame," and Marie passed on.

"I am afraid Marie is a dangerous coquette," Mildred remarked when the girl was out of hearing. "There is no denying that she is attractive, and knows well how to employ her feminine artifices."

"It may be but the effervescence of youth," Sir Philip would have defended Marie, knowing the cause of Mildred's observation. "All French youth is vivacious, you know. Marie may be quite harmless."

"Hers is the heart of a butterfly," Mildred returned. "Her vanity is distressing. I am sorry for Wilson."

"He appears to be very enamoured of her," Sir Philip observed.

"Then you have been talking to him this morning?"

"Yes. In addition to the apology you demand for my protracted absence, I admit I should have reported my arrival earlier. As a matter of fact, I have been discussing hybrids for half an hour."

"Orchids!" Mildred exclaimed petulantly. "In this house it is nothing but orchids. Oh, I know there is the excuse that Richard has some new ones. I am not surprised that he carries them first in his mind, but you . . ."

"Richard asked me to look at them," Sir Philip replied.

"You saw Richard?"

"I met him as I was coming into the park."

"Then you knew I would be alone? Oh. Phil, it was unlike you to treat me like that. But it makes no difference," she added, "since even you are constrained to give the orchids first place in your consideration."

"You know that is not my choice, Mildred," he said.

"What else am I to think?" she demanded. "With Richard away, I suppose you would have been bored with my company."

"Perhaps I thought to discharge what I considered a minor duty first, so as not to mar the rest of the day," Sir Philip returned.

"Very nicely expressed," she ceded. "But . . . to get back to our interrupted topic, if being with me is such a pleasure, what has kept you away so long?"

"My lack of moral courage," he told her.

"Phil! what do you mean?"

"Surely, Mildred, you do not need to be reminded of my unpardonable breach of honour?"

"Phil!" she said imploringly. "Can you not forget that one lapse for which I cannot believe either of us was responsible? If either of us was to blame, it was I alone. Phil, I have never ceased to pray for your forgiveness for causing this rupture between us."

"Mildred!"

"Don't stop me, Phil. I knew, of course, why you were staying away, and what else could I do but blame myself? I have longed for an opportunity to talk about it, believing it to be the only way to clear away the cloud. I have so few friends that I cannot afford to lose those who are most

dear to me. You know I have always loved you as a brother. Didn't I trust you with my most intimate confidences? Surely you will not refuse to make allowances for the fact that I was distraught that day?"

They had reached the clematis arbour, and he arranged her comfortably upon the rustic bench of twisted oak as he answered: "I was not distraught, Mildred. I meant every word I said."

She turned her lustrous eyes towards him, and trembled as she saw the yearning that was ardent in his.

"Can you not forget that breach of honour, as you phrase it?" she asked. "Must our whole friendship be forfeited because of a *faux pas* for which I again say I was to blame?"

"There you wrong yourself, Mildred," he answered. "You cannot blame yourself because I love my brother's wife."

"Yes, I must. I encouraged your affection and esteem because I valued your comradeship. But I could not foresee that the other would follow," she finished sadly.

"Certainly not. You are above reproach, dear. No one in his wildest senses could accuse you of such duplicity."

"Yet you persist in scourging me as if I were actually guilty of such an offence. Can you not forget that you love me like that? A whole year's absence should have made your suffering less acute."

"It hasn't," he replied tersely. "Neither can I any longer endure idleness. I am accepting another appointment in the Diplomatic Service."

For a little while she sat with folded hands, gazing pensively at a piece of embroidery which she had extracted from her basket. When she did speak there was a wistful sadness in her voice.

"Is that really necessary for you, Phil?" she asked.

"I think it is the best," he answered. "Besides, I feel the need of some activity. Life around town becomes monotonous, and I am not really going far—just on the Continent. Whitehall has asked me to join the embassy in Buda-Pesth."

"Monotony! Activity!" Mildred echoed, and there was a tinge of bitterness in her voice. "You are fortunate to be a man, Philip, to be able to find such a congenial excuse as activity to get away from monotony. The woman stays at home, and goes through the dull routine of existence, no matter how irksome that monotony may become. So you are going away?"

"Don't you think it best?" he asked, in a tone of self-defence.

"I don't know," she said. "Perhaps it is. I did not mean to reproach you, for that would be selfish. The thought that is troubling me is that I seem destined to bring unhappiness to my friends, especially those whom I love the best. I have been dreading all this time that you were suffering, and, believe me also, Phil, my own sorrows have never been so poignant that I could for a moment forget your misery. Perhaps it is best, for if you go away time may heal the wound I have unwittingly caused. Has the long

separation not already commenced healing that wound?" she asked again.

"Don't ask me; Mildred," he answered.

"It is better for me to know everything," she said.

"Then, if I must tell you, I love you now, if that is possible, a thousand times more than I loved you then."

"I am sorry," was all she said.

They were silent for some moments before he remarked: "You could never love me like that, so I am not building upon any false hopes. You love Richard . . . you told me so."

"Yes, I love Richard," she said. "I did not always love him, but I have always loved you as a dear, dear brother. I have never permitted myself to think of you otherwise, and I pray God that He will prevent me from doing so. Yet I have always wished to be loved . . . to be the most treasured possession of someone who really loved me, and your devotion to me never failed to mitigate my deepest sorrow. Will it make it easier for you, Phil, if I tell you that, were I free, nothing could give me greater happiness than to entrust myself to you?"

"Mildred, you are an angel!" he said full-heartedly.

"No, not an angel," she replied. "Merely a woman with an infinite capacity to love, and with an unutterable yearning to be loved. Oh, Phil! Why didn't you woo me before I married Richard? Did you not love me then?"

Sir Philip laughed harshly.

"Yes, I loved you then," he said. "Not so passionately as I do now, perhaps. I was unsophisticated then . . . a fanatical adherent to the Parkinson principles . . . the Parkinson

traditions, the Parkinson laws of heredity . . . the super-divine rights, if possible, of the Parkinson eldest son! Yes, I loved you then, Mildred, but you were already selected for Richard, and I should have deemed it the unforgivable sin to so much as lift my eyes to you—that was why I first went to St. Petersburg—let alone usurp the prerogative of the Parkinson's anointed!"

"Please don't blaspheme, Phil!" Mildred pleaded earnestly. "It was all a mistake, and one that cannot be rectified. Besides, I tell you that I have grown to love Richard. I married him, because . . . well, there was a high standard set upon filial obligation even in my own family. You should thank God with me that I did not yield to your importunity, and so far forget my womanhood as to accept you as a lover, for that is all it could have been. Richard would never have given me a divorce—not even were my lover a stranger. With you he would have been even more merciless, for it would have necessitated dragging his own family honour in the dust."

The thought that she might have been his did not improve the situation much in Sir Philip's opinion, and the memory of his self-abnegation for the sake of Richard and family principles added fuel to the flame of his bitterness.

"Don't worry, dear," he said, laughing scornfully. "You were a necessary adjunct to our wonderful scheme of posterity, while I was the principal accessory to my own immolation on the family altar."

"Don't, Phil, don't!" she pleaded, with a sob in her voice. "Is it kind of you to remind me of Richard's only

reason for marrying me? Are you going to lacerate me, too, because I have not fulfilled Richard's expectations? Phil, I can't bear it!" And her fortitude giving way to the stress of her emotion, the sobs she had been strangling refused to be dominated by the force of her courage. She broke down altogether, and wept without restraint.

In a moment he was on his knees beside her, holding her hands, and covering them with burning kisses.

"Forgive me, dear heart!" he pleaded in turn. "I am a brute to punish you because of my own selfish disappointment. Please don't cry, Mildred! If you do, I shall have to take you in my arms; and if I take you in my arms, I shall have to kiss you. Please forgive me, dear, for being human . . . but every vein in my body is throbbing with the mad desire to make you my own. It would have been better if I had gone away without seeing you like this."

"In which case I should never have forgiven you," she said, trying to withdraw her hands from his. But he refused to let them go, and she added: "It will be better for both of us now that we have come to an understanding. I am so glad it is over."

"Yes, over," he repeated mechanically. "That being so, perhaps I had better go."

This time it was her fingers that increased their pressure.

"No, Phil, stay . . . and carry out your original intention of spending the rest of the day with me," she said. "There is so much that I want to talk about, some things concerning myself which I could mention to no one but you."

Let me have this last day, Phil. I will dry my eyes so that you can see I am really smiling."

"Dear!" Sir Philip exclaimed, at which her smile grew brighter still.

"Then you will stay?" she queried.

"I will."

"Then get up off your knees. If you promise to behave yourself, you may sit beside me."

CHAPTER III

MILDRED'S REQUEST

"TELL me all about the new appointment," Mildred said a few minutes later.

Sir Philip told her what he had told his brother. "The Secretary is looking for an amicable climax to our peace negotiations," he ended.

"From the papers, I should imagine war to be imminent," Mildred said dubiously.

"The papers know nothing," he declared. He added: "Before I go, I want you to promise to send for me if I can help you in any way."

"No, Phil, I wouldn't do that," she replied. "I can see that you have got to put me out of your mind entirely. I want an answer to my prayer that you may meet someone who can give you what it is not in my power to give. Besides, I want to be able to rejoice in your success without feeling that I have been an incubus rather than the incentive I should be towards your best efforts. Today," she added, regarding him with increased earnestness, "I am going to encroach upon your sympathy in a manner which, I am afraid, is not a step towards encouraging your forgetfulness. But I have no one else to whom I can turn, and your being here today is opportune. Tell me, Phil, will you help me even if it is against your own prejudices?"

"Relief from your obvious anxiety counts more than any prejudice," he answered. "I will do anything you ask, dear."

"Then take me this afternoon to consult Mother Haggerty," Mildred astonished him.

He gazed at her for a moment or two incredulously . . not alone because of the strange credence Richard had expressed in the gypsy's prognostications, but because Mother Haggerty was held to be a witch in the utmost sense of the word—a worker in magic, an expert in psychic experiments . . a possessor of the evil eye! Sir Philip hardly dared to conceive what action Richard would take if he knew Mildred had been to consult her.

"You cannot mean it," he said at last.

"She alone can tell me what I *must* know," Mildred replied earnestly.

Sir Philip demanded: "What can she tell you but a repetition of her evil predictions!"

"She can relieve me of months of agonizing suspense," Mildred answered. Then, to his increased bewilderment, she added quietly: "Phil, there is a possibility that there may at last be an heir to the estate!"

"Mildred!"

"I can speak to you of this, Phil, even when I cannot mention it to Richard," she went on, trying to speak calmly. "Besides, as heir apparent to the estate, you have a right to know."

"Why can't you tell Richard?" he asked her, mystified.

"Mother Haggerty predicted to Richard that he would never have a son," Mildred answered. "I have a present-

iment that she was right, and . . if I gave him a daughter, not a son, I should be doubly cursed. You know enough about his wishes to understand that."

"And I also understand enough about Haggerty to know that she would not change her predictions to afford you any satisfaction."

"I don't want her to change them . . if they are correct. All I want her to do is to tell me the truth. Money can do a lot, Phil, and I would be more than generous to her."

Sir Philip tried to evade the question. "Richard could surely not blame you for a circumstance over which you have absolutely no control," he argued. "He cannot expect a male succession continued to perpetuity. I think you are foolish to worry about a decree of Nature which is incontrovertible. Richard would be delighted . . ."

"You know he would not, Phil," she interrupted him. "If only once he had asked me to give him a child there might be some hope that you are right. But you yourself have often remarked that there is only one god upon this family altar. His constant reiteration is for a son . . a son! I would rather hear from Mother Haggerty that my child will be a daughter than go through the months of suspense waiting."

"The cure of the suspense will be worse than the suspense itself if she tells you what you are dreading," he still argued.

"You don't understand a woman, Phil," she returned. "I am dreading Richard's wrath, but the sure knowledge that I am to become a mother will have its compensations."

Can you not understand how my very heart is sobbing for a child? I have never lacked a mother's yearning for the child of her own body. I would give more than life for the glorious privilege of feeling my baby's hand clutching my bosom . . . its tiny head nestling upon my own self. But if I am to be the one wife of a Parkinson to bring discredit to the Parkinson traditions, I shall need all the fortitude I can command between now and then. It is the uncertainty that kills."

"Richard must be mad," Sir Philip said savagely.

"He is . . . in that respect. In other things he is the most level-headed man I know," Mildred defended him.

"Monomania is the worst form of madness," Sir Philip replied. "Good God! If anything happened to you through his morbid disappointment, I would kill him!"

☉ "Phil, dear, don't make me wish I had not told you," she pleaded. "You must not blame Richard for his prejudices. They are the most hereditary curse of the whole Parkinson line. You know that. His and your father, and your father's father, are alone responsible for that. Richard is not responsible for his hereditary environment."

"He could at least break away from it."

"No, he could not. It is too deep-rooted."

"And yet he dares sit upon the County Bench, and mete out punishment to men who may be the victims of worse environment, and lacking the education to enable them to break away from it."

"He is your brother, Phil, and my husband . . . the father of my child that is to be. When you censure him

with your harsh thoughts you chastise me too. I told you I loved him, Phil."

"I realize that you are an angel, dear," Sir Philip said again, appalled by her earnestness. "In my anxiety for you I keep forgetting myself."

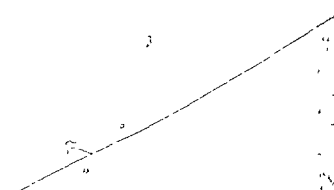


"It seems there was a little anxiety in your voice for the Parkinson posterity too," she replied.

"Perhaps there was," he admitted. "The birth of a son and heir to Richard . . . or even a daughter, for that matter . . . would relieve much of my own anxiety."

"Shall we go immediately after lunch?" she asked him.

Much as he would have liked to withdraw from the situation, he acquiesced with the arrangement, and together they left the clematis bower.

"Perhaps you would go round to the stables now and order the horses," Mildred suggested, as they approached the house. "Just yours and mine, you know. We must not take a groom with us."



CHAPTER IV

MOTHER HAGGERTY

MOTHER HAGGERTY lived alone in a disreputable hovel at some little distance from the road connecting Enfield with Cheshunt, about three miles from Moatlands Manor, and on the edge of a tract of common land. To all appearances, she derived a precarious living from fortune-telling, or working charms. Beyond that she had no visible means of subsistence. But the common land was the frequent camping ground of bands of wandering gypsies, and it was evident that she was held in awe by these troupes of nomads. By some it was held that they came and went at her command, and from this fact she was frequently called the 'Gypsy Queen'. Sometimes this was changed to the 'Witch Queen', and both names appeared to apply to her deservedly. All the evil that occurred within her immediate vicinity was rightly or wrongly attributed to her, whether it was a case of a still-born child, a seizure of epilepsy, an untimely death, or even a disease among swine or poultry. Such are the concomitants of notoriety.

So far as human companionship was concerned, she dwelt alone in her hovel, which was situated within the protecting shelter of a small circle of trees. The only creature that

lived with her was a large, jet-black raven. This bird, as is common with its species in captivity, had developed an almost human intelligence. To the casual observer it was just a domestic pet, but let Mother Haggerty produce her cards, or her astrological charts, and it at once displayed a great interest in the proceedings, following with its beady eyes the indications of her finger, and assisting her calculations with guttural croakings.

Sir Philip Parkinson was not very much impressed by the reports concerning her delving in magic. Apart from his infatuation for his brother's wife, he might have been categorized among the phlegmatic class of autocratic commoners, immune from superstition and its attendant premonitions. His brother's efforts to secure Haggerty's condemnation for the evil she was assumed to perform met with little or no sympathy from him . . . his brother's present attitude towards her prophecies with less.

He considered Mother Haggerty a harmless exponent and devotee of a mediæval art—a faker, of course, like any other charlatan. Such powers as she was supposed to possess are often attributed by the superstitious to advanced age such as hers. Old and shriveled, she hobbled about her cabin with the aid of a blackthorn crutch, while the knuckles of the hand with which she grasped it appeared ready to protrude through the skin. In strange contrast to her wizened features, her hair was as black as the feathers of her bird. Her eyes were black and piercing, sometimes lit up with the fires of passion, never somnolent as is usual with persons of very advanced age. Peering from beneath her beetling

brows, they were enough to strike terror into a timid heart. Therefore it is no wonder they added a magnetic force to her statements, and added to her notoriety as a possessor of the evil eye.

In spite of his disbelief in these powers, knowing the risk of discovery by her husband that Mildred was running, Sir Philip started with Mildred towards the northern lodge gate of the park in a very unenviable frame of mind. He replied ironically to Mildred's suggestion: "Let us canter as if we were just out for exercise." . . . "The clandestine visit of the Squire's wife will be an occasion of great triumph to Haggerty."

"Don't be a wet blanket, Phil," Mildred protested. "It has required all my courage to face the ordeal, and, if money will purchase her silence, I will see that she is well satisfied."

Sir Philip said no more, and they galloped across the park without any further attempt at conversation.

Once through the lodge gate, their path followed the course of a country lane with tall hedge rows on either side—a typical thoroughfare of rural England, sheltered by the tangled growths of hawthorn and bramble, hazel and sweet-smelling brier, with bunches of blackberries of tempting lusciousness hanging within easy reach, and occasional clusters of nuts not yet ripe enough for gathering. Here and there gates opened into orchards with trees loaded with apples and other fruits, or pasturages where recumbent cattle chewed the cud of silent contentment.

Haggerty's abode was just beyond the limits of the Par-
kinson estate, about a mile and a half from where the lane

crossed the Enfield-Cheshunt highway. At the point of intersection, a scattered growth of small timber, known as the Hickmanworth Copse, separated the riders from their destination, and they chose an unfrequented path through the trees, riding over ground which in Springtime would be carpeted with primroses and wild hyacinths.

At the edge of this wood Mildred hesitated for a moment in dismay. Drawn up near Haggerty's hovel were several road caravans of the type used by wandering gypsies. Scattered here and there were a number of small tents, not unlike Indian tepees, which these itinerant people never use except on permanent locations.

"A fine horde of potential blackmailers," Sir Philip suggested scornfully.

"Richard's position should discountenance any possibility of that," Mildred said.

"It is you they will blackmail . . . to keep the affair from Richard," Sir Philip replied.

"I have enough pride to face Richard before I would submit to such a thing," Mildred declared, starting forward again.

Men and women in drably picturesque garb gazed at them curiously as they rode towards the encampment. Numerous small children, costumed with a quaintness surpassing that of their parents, left their tasks of fashioning wooden clothes line pegs and wicker baskets to scamper towards them, holding out their grimy hands, and loudly demanding pennies.

More from force of habit than otherwise, Sir Philip tossed them a handful of coins. One or two scrambled for them in the grass, but the others followed, even clinging to his stirrups as they demanded more. Mildred placed a restraining hand on his arm as he half raised his riding crop.

From the group of adults a dark-skinned girl, with some pretensions to beauty, walked over to them.

"Cross my palm with gold, lovely lady, and I will give you beautiful fortune," she said, holding out her hand. "You have a handsome cavalier, noble lady. It would be worth two gold pieces to find your happiness mingled with his."

Before Mildred could speak, there came from the door of Haggerty's hovel a flow of language in the Romany tongue which caused this latest arrival to efface herself quickly, while the youthful mendicants fell back several paces. As if in obedience to Haggerty's authority, the older gypsies sprang into activity, and herded the younger members of the community towards the scattered tents and caravans, leaving Haggerty in sole possession of the field. Then silence, broken only by the hoarse croaking of the raven, which had been perched throughout on Haggerty's shoulder.

As they neared the hovel Haggerty went inside, pausing only to say abruptly: "Tie your horses to the trees. No one will touch them."

They followed her to the door of the hovel, but hesitated on the threshold. It required a moment or two for their eyes to become accustomed to the dimmer light of the interior, for there was but one window, and that was fest-

ooned with cobwebs. Mildred shuddered as she contemplated the uninviting aspect of the cabin, which, dirty and untidy, boasted of little in the way of furniture. A log fire was smouldering in the open grate. Over it stretched the legs of a tripod and from the small pot suspended over the fire emanated the not unpleasant odor of cooking herbs.

"Come in, if you want to ask me anything," Haggerty said curtly. To Mildred she added: "What do you expect to gain from the woman your husband has tried to hang?"

"I am willing to compensate you for what you have suffered," Mildred answered, "if money can . . ."

Haggerty interrupted her scornfully: "If it was gold I wanted, Miranda could have earned it for me. By reading your palm she could have told you what you want to know. I sent her away because the things you must know I wished to tell you myself."

"If it would mitigate your hatred of my husband. I would beg your forgiveness on my knees," Mildred went on, still trying to pacify her.

"Mildred! What are you saying?" Sir Philip exclaimed, tightening his hold on her arm.

"And why shouldn't she, if I wished it?" Haggerty demanded, looking at Sir Philip with blazing eyes. "You and your kind despise me because I am the humble seer, but I can boast of prouder blood than you, Philip Parkinson. Who are you, if I wish her to do so, to stop this woman from crawling in the dust at my feet . . . I, the daughter of queens . . . ?"

"You do your vaunted lineage credit," Sir Philip said with disgust.

"I didn't expect you to believe it," Haggerty returned witheringly.

"It would certainly require better proof than this," he said, indicating her domicile.

"There are things I can tell you that require no proof," Haggerty replied. "What if I should tell her husband that you are the lover of this woman?"

Sir Philip stepped towards her with an angry gesture, while Mildred sank with a sob upon the only seat the hovel afforded.

"Silence, hag!" he commanded.

"Tell me I lie!" Haggerty challenged.

"Please, Phil!" Mildred pleaded.

"Some spy . . ." Sir Philip began. He was staggered at Haggerty's knowledge.

"Do I need the aid of spies," Haggerty questioned contemptuously, "while the stars are an open book to those who can read them? In them I have read of calamity, disaster, and violent death for all who bear the name of Parkinson. Could a spy have told me that Richard Parkinson will never have a son? Or why this woman, his wife, should come to me at the first breath of approaching disaster, thinking that perhaps I can change her destiny I would not change it if I could; rather would I add my curse to the evil that is approaching the whole brood. I will satisfy you with proof that what I say is truth . . . that I know why you have come. The daughter who will be born to

this woman will be the first blow to shake the tottering foundations of the House of Parkinson!"

She turned again to stirring the contents of her pot of herbs as Mildred rose tremblingly and approached her, offering her purse to the hag, saying: "You have at least told me what I wanted to know. Recompense yourself as you will from this purse."

"Perish your gold!" Haggerty replied fiercely, thrusting Mildred's hand away. "I have nothing further to say to you. Go!"

The gypsy strangers watched their departure without essaying to impede their progress, or even to follow them as they mounted their horses and penetrated the trees of the Hickmanworth Copse.

They had ridden some distance in silence, when a figure emerged from the bushes and stood in the pathway before them. It was the girl whom Haggerty had called Miranda. In her, Mildred thought she saw a means of recompensing the other's ungracious prophecy.

She opened her purse, and, extracting some gold pieces, proffered them to the bedraggled gypsy. Miranda took them in feverish haste, and in doing so seized Mildred's hand, forced the fingers open, and gazed with rapt scrutiny on her palm. Mildred watched her, and trembled again at the ominous over-clouding of the girl's brow. Miranda's words corroborated what Haggerty had foretold.

"Fair lady, she hate you," she said. "She tell you nothing but evil. I hoped to find for you perhaps something that was good."

"And cannot you find anything that will bring a little happiness into my life?" Mildred queried.

"Noble lady, I can only tell you that you will never be very happy," the gypsy answered. "You give your love where it is not returned. Forgive me for saying it, but it is just what I see. I am afraid your baby girl, when she comes, will bring you more unhappiness."

"No, no, no!" Mildred said almost fiercely. "My baby will bring me happiness. I will give you ten more pieces of gold for telling me that!"

Miranda repulsed the additional gift. Indeed, she offered back the money she had already taken. "Please, no, noble lady," she exclaimed. "I couldn't tell what I do not see, even for a shower of gold. If you want to be good to me, make me a promise instead of giving me money."

"Why, what promise can I make, child?" Mildred asked her.

"I am afraid of Mother Haggerty," Miranda explained. "If she find out I speak to you, she will punish me. Perhaps she kill me . . . I don't know. I have nowhere to go, but, if I could come to you. . ."

"In that case, I will certainly look after you," Mildred said warmly. "Here, take the gold too, child. I feel you have earned it, and my promise also."

"Thank you, kind lady," Miranda said. Then, folding her shawl about her shoulders, she hurried quickly into the trees.

"You will certainly see her again," Sir Philip remarked, displeased with Mildred for trafficking with one of Hag-

gerty's satellites. "Her refusing your money was doubtless just a bluff."

"Perhaps it wasn't, Phil," Mildred replied. "And . . . our journey has not been in vain. I can build up hopes on the certainty, while the suspense would have killed. I know I cannot expect happiness from Richard, but my baby will more than compensate any injustice from him."

CHAPTER V

"YOUR SON OR MINE"

IT was late in the afternoon when Richard returned to the Park. He found Sir Philip in the library.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting so long Philip," he said. "The case was longer than I expected. It isn't finished yet. When do you want to get back to town?"

"There's no hurry, Richard. Any time before midnight."

Richard touched a bell pull by the fireplace. "Instruct Peters what cocktail you would like," he said, as the valet entered. "I'll adapt my taste to yours." To Peters: "Tell your mistress we will dine as soon as she is ready."

"Dinner is ordered for fifteen minutes after your return, sir," Peters informed him. "My lady wishes me to ask you to dispense with formality, sir."

"Then we will eat before we discuss business," the Squire said to his brother. "What did you think of the new specimens?"

Though he felt keenly Richard's rudeness in not mentioning Mildred first, Sir Philip was glad the orchids were more in the Squire's mind. He said cheerfully: "I think they are fine. I hope Wilson doesn't pamper them, and develop weaklings."

"Why should he do that?"

"The reward you have promised him for winning the Claverton Prize might make him over-anxious."

"I think he's too level-headed for that," Richard said. "I like to encourage a good man."

They drained their glasses as the gong sounded for dinner.

As Mildred entered the dining-room Sir Philip was glad to observe that she had removed all traces of the emotion she had undergone. Her face was a trifle pale, perhaps, but such a pallor enhanced the exotic beauty of her finely-chiseled features. She was like a beautiful lily whose snow-white petals are emblematic of spotless purity. Sir Philip wondered, as he gazed at her, that Richard's heart was not touched by the pride of possession of such a lovely flower of womanhood. He marveled that any man could possess such a woman without experiencing a reciprocating love.

Apparently Richard was not interested in that part of the day they had spent together. His conversation was mainly about the orchids, and some of the features of the court case he had attended. He did not mention Sir Philip's new appointment. That was typical of his customary reticence about important matters in the presence of his wife. He introduced the subject immediately they had returned to the library.

"I don't like the way the papers speak of the tension between Russia and Turkey," he said. "It seems to me that the appointment in Buda-Pesth is so that you may be close at hand if trouble arises."

Sir Philip smiled. "That is the way I look at it," he said. "The Capital of Austria-Hungary is merely a *point d'exigence*."

"Which means quite an element of danger for you, Philip."

Sir Philip brushed that aside. "Nothing in excess of the usual element in the Balkan States," he replied. "There is always more or less danger at the hands of the impetuous Turk."

"You are never serious, Philip," Richard grumbled.

"Individual seriousness is three parts boredom," Sir Philip smiled. "Besides, this will give me an opportunity to break away from the petty narrowness of self."

"You don't quite get my meaning," Richard replied. "If you want to get away from yourself, why not employ some of your surplus energy in family interests."

"Don't you think the State has the prerogative of absorbing my energy?" Sir Philip questioned.

"I admit that the State has a right to claim the services of the individual, but those services should not be allowed to alienate one from personal duties," Richard objected.

Sir Philip replied somewhat irritably. "There are several ways of regarding that, Richard. The combination might form an ideal state of existence, but, unfortunately, there are few of us able to maintain an equipoise between the personal and the general. Besides, you have your own idea of the correct interpretation to be placed upon the family interest clause in the Parkinson code. We won't quarrel because it doesn't coincide with mine. Rather will

48 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

we change the subject. Will you drink success to my new undertaking?"

As he spoke, he walked across to the decanter wagon. Richard frowned. He was hurt by his brother's sarcasm, and he disliked promiscuous drinking. A cocktail before dinner, and wine with meat, constituted the beginning and end of his own libations. He had already exceeded his limit in partaking of an extra cocktail, drinking success to the hybrids.

"If you have already decided to accept the appointment I will, of course," he answered, with ill-concealed annoyance. "If I could have seen you comfortably married first, I would drink it with better grace."

Sir Philip walked quickly across to him, dismayed by the haggard expression on the Squire's face. Perhaps, after all, he thought, he himself was unduly prejudiced. Richard was not altogether to blame for the obstacle which he considered would always prevent him from marrying.

"Honestly, Richard," he said, "I hate to think of your reconciling yourself to a childless life, and I being called upon to provide an heir to the estate."

"I know you do, Philip," Richard conceded. "But facts are facts. You and I are the only Parkinsons left, and it is incumbent upon one of us to perpetuate the family name. If you walk into the danger zone of the Balkans, and are assassinated, the only hope of the family is gone. I would rather drink to your safety than your success."

"You are over-pessimistic, Richard," Sir Philip replied, wishing he could reveal to him what he knew. "Mildred is

young yet. Drink to my safety if you will, and I will drink to the future heir of the Parkinsons."

"I will even change that," Richard said, raising his glass. "Here's to his speedy advent, whether he be your son or mine!"

They drained their glasses in silence, and Sir Philip thought the subject was dropped. Richard, however, found it hard to relinquish it. He remarked: "Pardon my seeming curiosity, Philip, but . . . have you never met a lady who could induce you to sink your bachelor prejudices?"

"I will give you a frank reply to that," Sir Philip answered. "It may help you to understand my position better. I have loved a woman, and still love her . . . one whose soul I am not worthy to touch. She was, and is, unattainable."

"No peer of the realm can boast of better blood than you, and, as heir apparent to the Parkinson acres, your social qualifications could not be excelled," Richard replied, with warmth and arrogance.

Social qualifications! Purity of blood! For a moment Sir Philip was tempted to smile as he conjured up a vision of the decrepit hag who that afternoon had told him scornfully: "I can boast of better blood than you! I am the descendant of queens!"

He recalled himself with an effort. Richard was too serious for him to smile. It was better to have the matter settled once and for all, no matter what his brother might think of the disclosure.

"Such considerations are not the obstacle," he said. "The

lady to whom I refer already has a husband. Fortunately she does not love me."

"Good heavens!" Richard groaned. "The Parkinsons are indeed cursed in this generation! That I should listen to such a confession . . . from my own brother!"

"Well?" Sir Philip challenged. "Now you have the whole secret of my refusal to marry. What do you think of it?"

But Richard's manner had changed. He could not doubt his brother's sincerity.

"Philip, believe me, I am sorry for you," he said. "Had I known this I would never have tried to persuade you."

"On your honour, Richard, you will not seek to discover her identity?"

"There is no need to ask that," Richard answered with dignity. "I am grateful to you for keeping the honour of the House unsullied. But I thank God my nature is different to yours . . . that I am not capable of love in the sense in which you understand it."

Sir Philip placed his hand on the Squire's arm. "Pardon me, Richard," he said, "but may I not suggest that you have the remedy in your own hands. It should not be beneath the dignity of any man, peer or peasant, to make love to his own wife."

"I have not failed in any of my obligations," Richard grumbled.

"That's the whole trouble with you, Richard," Sir Philip told him, constrained to make a last fight for Mildred's happiness. "You have limited yourself to your so-called ob-

ligations. Without love, you might just as well prostitute your nature as give it grudgingly . . . mechanically. Mildred loves you, and her faculties are being starved because you deny to her your own love. Why don't you make her feel that she herself is a necessary adjunct to you . . . not merely to the House of Parkinson. The end is surely worth the means."

"You have strange ideas Philip."

"There are some things which dawn upon one when love takes possession of the soul," Sir Philip returned. "To me, a child that is born of fear or compulsion . . . even within the sanctified portals of conjugal relationship . . . is more illegitimate than the child of love which is stigmatized by the world as a bastard!"

As Richard did not reply, Sir Philip intimated that it was time he left. Richard excused himself from seeing him depart. He had some records to hunt up for tomorrow's court. Encountering a servant in the hall, Sir Philip asked her where he could find her mistress.

"Do you leave for the Continent tomorrow?" Mildred asked him as soon as they were alone.

"Yes," he told her.

"I am glad for your sake, Phil. I shall always pray for you," she said wistfully. "I am so sorry for you . . . poor, dear old Phil. You are getting the worst of this muddle."

"I can forget that part of it, knowing that one day you will be happy," he replied.

"Yes. When my baby is born I shall be a mother, and

that will give me a happiness which nothing can take from me. Are they bringing your horse round?"

"No. I thought I would fetch it myself."

"Then I'll get a cloak, and walk through the kitchen gardens with you. Would you like that?"

"You anticipate a wish I wanted to express," he said, pleased.

They discussed many important things as they traversed the gardens. Sir Philip urged upon her to tell Richard as soon as she felt she could, and she promised. At the far hedge of cypress they parted.

"Good-bye, dear old Phil, and may the best of fortune and success accompany you," she said, bravely concealing her unwillingness to let him go, her eyes filled with tears which she had great difficulty to suppress.

She raised her face to his. For a moment his lips touched hers. Then he was gone.

It was a week later that Mildred told her husband that there was the possibility of a child being born to him.

CHAPTER VI

THE HONOURABLE CLIVE AND MARIE

CHRISTMAS came and went. Moatlands Park had been the scene of greater festivity than it had witnessed for many years. As the months went by, and the closely-watched probability became a certainty, Richard Parkinson knew that he need not fear the humiliation of being the first Parkinson to die without issue. In some respects he had become a changed man. In others, he still remained a Parkinson. His attitude towards his wife had changed in but one particular. In view of her approaching motherhood, he was more solicitous of her well-being. That was necessary. She was destined to bring a future Parkinson into the world. That accomplished, there was no doubt that she would again be relegated, like other wives of other Parkinsons, to her regal position among the family chattels.

Never for one moment did he doubt the sex of the child that was to be born to him. It was the immutable law of heredity, unchanged and unchangeable, that would govern the birth of a son . . . his son! For the first time since the death of Richard Parkinson, his father, some ten years be-

fore, the Manor had been filled to capacity with guests. Most of these had departed, but at the beginning of February five still remained. There were Lord and Lady Tillingham with their son, the Honourable Clive Fairfax; Squire Barfleet of Dovedale in the County of Yorkshire—a portly widower of fifty summers, and distant relative of Mildred's—with his daughter Moira, a debutante of two seasons before.

The tarrying of these guests was the result of a pre-arranged plan, purely on account of the young people. They, with their parents, are only incidental to this narrative, and, having played their part in the drama of the Parkinson history, make their exit and appear no more upon the stage. Nevertheless, they are important in that they unconsciously precipitated matters, and were the indirect cause of a circumstance which affected the destiny of the Parkinson household.

Squire Barfleet, like Richard Parkinson, was a wealthy landowner. Unlike Richard Parkinson, who held no brief for patents of nobility, he was anxious that his daughter should acquire a title by marriage. And there was no reason why his ambition for her should not be realized. Moira was a charming maiden, delicately nurtured, refined almost to sensitiveness, and with a disposition to please. The Honourable Clive Fairfax, on the other hand, would inherit an empty title, with heavily mortgaged estates, and it was imperative that he should marry money . . . plenty of it, if he would ever hope to rid his heritage of its encumbrances. The case is, of course, not without numerous parallels. With the

connivance of the Master of Moatlands Park, the respective parents were prolonging their stay in order that the two young people, thrown together where there was no opposition, might decide the fortunes of both houses.

But Lord Tillingham's patience was becomingly sorely taxed by the apparently interminable delay. "I suppose you know, Clive," he said, entering his son's room one evening, "that we cannot continue to trespass upon our host's hospitality for an indefinite period."

The Honourable Clive raised his shoulders indifferently. "I am ready to go as soon as you say the word," he replied.

"You know we are staying only with your future interests in view," his father continued. "You are acting like a fool!"

"I may be," Clive returned, "but I refuse to be coerced into marrying a girl simply because she has oodles of money. I don't love Moira, and therefore I am not going to marry her. I would sooner work for a living, and let everything else go."

"You have not been educated to work."

"Well, as to that, is it my fault that I was born into an empty title?"

Lord Tillingham stamped out of the room, to meet Richard Parkinson in the hall.

"Clive again?" Parkinson asked, observing his agitation.

Tillingham sank into a chair as he nodded assent. He had not told Clive, but that morning he had received notice that the interest was overdue on one of his many mortgages.

"What is his objection to Moira?" the Squire asked.

"Says he doesn't love her. Would rather work."

"A little discipline . . ." Parkinson began.

"There are various opinions about taking a horse to the water," Lord Tillingham grumbled. "Perhaps I should have said 'an ass'."

"There are very few horses—or asses for that matter—that will refuse to drink if the water is palatable," Parkinson returned.

"It may not be altogether Clive's fault. Moira seems to have avoided him conspicuously of late."

"Possibly her woman's vanity is piqued at his lack of attention. Have you spoken to Barfleet about it?"

"I have. He says he was under the impression that Moira was in love with Clive."

"Then all I can suggest is that you give Clive more time to come to his senses," Parkinson said.

"I hate to impose further upon your hospitality," Lord Tillingham replied.

"Nonsense, my dear Tillingham," Parkinson said quickly. He added, with sincere cordiality: "I am indebted to you for staying. Honoria is splendid company for Mildred just now."

The cause of Clive's indifference, unsuspected because of its insignificance, was an infatuation for Marie, personal lady's maid to the Mistress of the Manor. As Mildred had suggested to Sir Philip, that day in the rose gardens, Marie was fickle, and incapable of a deep attachment. The young English Milor', as she called Clive, represented a fair target

for her coquetry. Within two weeks from his arrival at the Manor, he was head over heels in love with her.


An elopement was his only chance of marrying her. She refused. That was not according to the plans she mapped when she recovered from the shock of learning that he was penniless. She pouted deliciously when he suggested that he could work to support her. It was probably in conversation with Marie that the idea of working first occurred to him. Such a prospect had no appeal for Marie. Of what use some day to be 'Your Ladyship', if the position carried with it less financial benefit than she would acquire as the wife of Wilson, the head gardener!

She wanted to be rich . . . oh, very, very rich! She wanted to have fine dresses and jewels, maids to attend to her requirements, and, above all, unrestrained freedom. Marriage, faugh! What did she care for the conventions of marriage! Not for Marie Capote, that! Look at Milady and her husband, the Honourable Squire! No man should ever be in a position to treat her like that.

Better to use the Honourable Clive as a lover to the furtherance of her own ambitions. She knew he loved her, like 'Sir Pheeleep' loved her mistress. Marie had not watched her mistress and Sir Philip long before she had come to that conclusion. And Marie had observed more than that. Every day she was in intimate attendance upon Mrs. Parkinson . . . and she knew. That day in the garden, she had been anxious to get away quickly, for Mother Haggerty had told her to go to her at once with intelligence like that. Sir Philip was nearer correct than he had imagined when he

suggested a spy. He and Mildred were just half an hour behind Marie when they arrived at Haggerty's hovel. She had hidden when she heard their horses, though she did not know who was coming, and they had passed without seeing her.

According to Marie's reasoning, why should not a man marry one woman in order to confer benefits upon another? It was a much more convenient arrangement. How much nicer for him . . . love on the one hand, and riches on the other. So she was no obstacle to his marriage to Moira Barfleet. To his credit as an English gentleman, Clive turned the idea down flat. He had just returned from a stormy interview with Marie on that very topic when his father followed him into his room.



Marie was terribly disappointed, and there was only one source to which she could turn for aid. That was Mother Haggerty. The hag had encouraged her scheming, with far-seeing visions of her own. It happened to be Marie's '*soir de congé*'. She started at once to visit Haggerty, for there was no time to lose. She had heard her mistress and Lady Tillingham talking, and knew the guests would soon leave the Manor.

CHAPTER VII

MARIE VISITS HAGGERTY

WHEN intercepting Sir Philip and Mrs. Parkinson on their way homeward through the Hickmanworth Copse, the gypsy girl, Miranda, was not acting on her own initiative. It was Haggerty's purpose that the girl should ingratiate herself with the Mistress of Moatlands Park. To further schemes of her own it was necessary to get the girl under Mrs. Parkinson's protection. Marie's visit, to carry the information about her mistress's condition, was opportune in that respect.

Haggerty was expecting this information. It was not so much for her assistance as a spy that she had cultivated Marie as for the accomplishment of the purpose with which Miranda also was connected. It has already been observed that the hag was a skilled worker in psychic experiments. In the exact sense of the word she was no charlatan. Her powers of divination, especially in a case like that of the Parkinson family, upon which she concentrated the full force of her occult-trained intellect, were so marvelous as to be almost incredible. She had calculated with astonishing exactness the approximate date of the birth of Mildred's child,

and for several days before Sir Philip's visit to the Manor had been concentrating—influencing by telepathy, in which among other psychic forces she was an adept—upon a visit to herself by Mrs. Parkinson. The only manner in which Marie was of assistance to her—something which was quite unforeseen—was in telling her that Sir Philip was at Moatlands Park.

Haggerty was quick in grasping the possibilities of that fact. Sooner or later she knew that Mrs. Parkinson would come to her. She knew from Marie that Sir Philip was in love with his sister-in-law. What was more likely than that Mrs. Parkinson would choose this day for her visit, with Sir Philip at hand to act as her cavalier? Haggerty laid her plans with this possibility in mind. After Marie's departure she had time to instruct Miranda. Part of her harangue in the Romany tongue was to complete those instructions, particularly where they had reference to the apparent double-crossing of herself.

Satisfied with Miranda's report, Haggerty quickly set about other preparations for which the time was ripe.

"Soon you have to take the place of the girl who came before them," she informed Miranda. "She will die, and you must become lady's maid to the woman I hate. I must have someone in their house to do my bidding in things in which I would not trust the other."

"What will you expect me to do there?" Miranda asked her, without enthusiasm.

"There is time for that. I will make my own preparations. All you have to do is to get ready."

MARIE VISITS HAGGERTY 61

"I am not used to their ways," Miranda objected.

"You are clever, and you can learn. It is already understood with Michello. He will take you to London, and place you where you will learn. He understands the ways of the Gorgios, and can take his place among rulers when the curse of the Mother of Endor is forgotten. He, my son, will then be the ruler of my people."

"Michello is strong," Miranda said. "He has made love to me many times."

"He will marry you when I permit. Would you not be queen in my place, and learn all the secrets I have . . . secrets which are revealed by the stars . . . secrets of magic?"

"Yes, yes. But the girl, how shall I take her place?"

"I have told you I will arrange that. Go with Michello tomorrow."

Miranda went with Michello to London, where he placed her in a special training school. Fully equipped with the essentials of the part she was to fill, she was back again with Haggerty almost three weeks before that final visit of Marie's. The gypsies being absent from the common land, Michello had arranged a lodging for her in Cheshunt, where he himself frequently stayed. She was with Haggerty in the hovel, however, when Marie, breathless with haste, and flushed with excitement, burst in.

Marie drew back instantly. "Oh, pardon!" she exclaimed. "I not know you were engaged."

"Just a moment, dearie," Haggerty returned smoothly. "This lady is almost ready to depart."

"Oh, *certainement!* I not intrude." And Marie retired hurriedly, closing the door of the hovel behind her.

"The time has come," Haggerty said tersely. "Hide in the trees until she has gone. Come back then, and I will tell you what to do."

"She doesn't look much like dying," Miranda hazarded, suddenly fearful at Haggerty's eagerness.

"Leave that to me!" Haggerty told her.

"But I want to know."

Haggerty gazed at her for a moment before she replied. Then, instead of giving her the information directly, she asked: "Do you want to marry Michello, and be queen?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" Miranda was eager again. "Kill her if you want to. It is nothing to me."

"If you don't obey me always, I will kill you too," Haggerty thought to threaten. "Obey me, and you shall have my secrets of magic as well."

When Marie entered, Haggerty tried to pacify her. "You must not be impatient, dearie," she said soothingly, when she had listened to Marie's story. "Sometimes it takes a long time for these Gorgios to learn the meaning of love."

"I 'do not think it is ever possible Milor' Clive love me enough," Marie said. "He think I make one terrible suggestion. Why should he be shock' when I say I love him too much to marry him? Sometimes I think it is not the truth you tell me."

"Hush, dearie! I have read the stars many times for you, and they do not lie. They tell me your troubles will soon be over."

"Yes, but ze Tillinghams soon go 'way, and I get old while I wait," Marie expostulated. "See my lovely black 'airs! Some are grey, too. Milor' Clive he not see them, but soon he will."

"That can be remedied," Haggerty told her, "Do you not see my hair is black, and I am many times older than you."

"But your face . . . pardon me, it look old."

"It became old before I discovered the wonderful potion I have told you about."

"But yes," Marie exclaimed excitedly. "You have promise me ze Elixir of Youth you tell me about. I do all you reques', and you never give it to me."

"You have never told anyone that you come to see me?" Haggerty questioned.

"No, no!" Marie said impatiently. "Have I not promise'?"

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes, yes . . . but of course."

Haggerty went to a small cupboard and produced a tiny phial filled with a colorless liquid.

"This is it," she said, handing the phial to the excited girl. "It has taken a long time to prepare it for you, and to get the charm ready. I must work the charm when you drink it, and I warn you it won't act if you breathe a word to anybody. Besides, I shall know."

Marie was almost too agitated to promise, but Haggerty was satisfied. This was the wonderful reward that Haggerty had promised her for months past, and at last it was

in her hands. She heard Haggerty saying to her: "Drink it tonight when you go to bed. At what time will that be?"

"Almost exac' ten o'clock."

"I also will work the charm then," Haggerty assured her. "Now you had better hurry away. You have been here quite a long time, and you may be missed."

Marie thanked her again, and left the hovel with a buoyant heart, skipping daintily through the shadows of the Hickmanworth Copse, and thinking of nothing but her good fortune. After all, the Elixir of Youth meant more to her than the love of Milor' Clive. Love her . . bah! He didn't love her enough to take her when she offered herself. With perpetual youth she did not need to be afraid. Some other rich milor' . . .

Suddenly she came face to face with Wilson!

Jealousy had driven the gardener for days past into spying upon Marie's actions, and watching her interviews with the Honourable Clive Fairfax. He knew—or thought—that Marie was lost to him, for she attempted no dissimulation when he accused her of flouting him.

Seeing her crossing the park stealthily, he had followed. He had seen her go into Haggerty's hovel, and had awaited her return at some little distance inside the copse.

Marie stopped abruptly as she saw him blocking her path. The next moment she faced him with blazing eyes.

"*Espion!*" she accused him. "You have follow' me like one poodle!"

"I have," Wilson admitted. "More than that, I know where you have been. You won't be my lady's maid to

MARIE VISITS HAGGERTY 65

Mrs. Parkinson long after I have told what I know to the Squire”.

“Faugh!” Marie said, flipping her fingers in his face. “I hate you!” she added passionately, as it occurred to her that Wilson might betray her before Mother Haggerty had worked her wonderful charm. “I think perhaps I love you before. Now I detes’ you. *Espion!*”

“You can call me what you like, but you are going to be sorry that you played fast and loose with me,” Wilson returned. “After seeing the way you have thrown yourself at Fairfax, I wouldn’t marry you if you asked me to. I have waited an opportunity to get a hold on you, and now I’ve got it. I don’t suppose your wonderful milord would marry you in any case, but you are going to swear right now to break with him, or I report to the Squire where you have been. You know what that means.”

Marie recognized that she must do something to save a few hours. If she could keep this importunate lover silent until the morrow. *Nom d’un chien!* She had called him a poodle, but a poodle was too good a dog to associate with him.

“You make me cross just now, and I speak foolish,” her tone was conciliatory. “You ver’ foolish boy, just the same. You think a girl must not be amuse’. You think I not make a good wife because I play a little with Milor’ Clive. What you say if I tell you he ask me to marry him, and I refuse?”

“Is that the truth?” he asked her.

“But yes. I think to make you a little bit jealous, and

you go . . what you say? . . off ze deep end. Perhaps, if you want to kees me . . . " And she sidled up to him without finishing her half query, and pouted lips which looked very tempting and delicious.

Presently Wilson linked her arm through his, seemingly quite happy. He was very much in love with Marie, and just now intoxicated with her kisses. Neither of them had any idea that the gypsy girl, Miranda, had been near enough not only to watch them, but to hear most of their conversation as well.

She, Miranda, ran quickly to Haggerty immediately they were out of sight, and related what she had seen and heard.

"Go and fetch Michello," Haggerty said. There was more emotion in her mind than in her voice.

As for Marie, her thoughts were in a peculiar turmoil for the remainder of the evening. She wondered most about the charm of which Haggerty had spoken, and which she had said was necessary for benefit to arise from drinking the Elixir of Youth. Haggerty would be very angry if she knew that Wilson had followed her, and knew of her visit, but Marie could not see how she could be held responsible for that. She had not betrayed her friend. Finally she comforted herself with the thought that Mother Haggerty could not possibly know. The charm would have worked before knowledge could come to Mother Haggerty's ears.

And Wilson . . . ! He should realize what contempt she could show when he came to her again with his attentions. He might tell the Squire, but then . . . Bah! What did it matter to her afterwards if she lost her position?

Other miladies would be glad enough of her services. Perhaps she might be able to enter the service of a grand lady with a younger husband, who would appreciate the privileges the Honourable Clive had rejected. Who could tell!

She examined the little phial several times, and very carefully, before she went to bed, holding it up to the light, and wondering how such a colourless preparation could hold the essentials of everlasting youth. But Mother Haggerty was clever, yes. She knew many things Marie could not understand. She hoped that she was not clever enough to know that she and Wilson had come away from the Hickmanworth Copse together.

When ready for bed, she sat for some time turning the phial over in her hands before attempting to drink the contents. She was not nervous—certainly not; but it seemed too wonderful to be true that the much coveted Elixir of Youth was in her hands, and she hesitated, trying to anticipate the thrill it would give her . . . that marvelous sensation of rejuvenescence! When she extracted the cork from the bottle she smelt at the contents before tasting them, her amazement at their potency increasing as she discovered that they were odourless as well as colourless . . . tasteless, too, as she moistened the tip of her tongue.

Then she drained the bottle, placing it afterwards on her dressing-table.

She tried to diagnose her sensations, seeking to discern if there were any immediate results. She thought . . perhaps it was only her imagination . . that she experienced a warm, soothing glow, which seemed to pervade her whole being.

Beyond the fact that her eyes were sparkling with expectancy, she saw no change in herself as she surveyed her reflection in the mirror. It was disappointing too, to discover that the impression of warmth was rapidly becoming less pronounced. She went to sleep hoping that Mother Haggerty would not forget to work the charm she had promised.

Haggerty did not forget!

Back at the hovel off the Enfield-Cheshunt highway, as the clock in a distant steeple was striking the hour of midnight, she placed some fresh fagots on her fire, and combed with her claw-like fingers into the wreaths of green smoke that arose from it, muttering some strange incantation in the Romany tongue, and turning ever and anon to speak to the raven which was perched upon her shoulder, its beady eyes following with apparent interest the formation she made with the smoke from the fire.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CORONER'S QUANDARY

M OATLANDS PARK awoke to the shock of Marie's death. The fact was discovered by one of the other maids, despatched by Mrs. Parkinson to Squire would have kept the matter from his wife, for the effect might be serious to her in her condition. All he could do was to telephone for Dr. Matthews, who came with all the speed to which he could press his horse.

When he arrived he could discover no circumstance which might account for her death. There was the small, empty phial on the girl's dressing-table, but there were no physical evidences to indicate poisoning. That left only one thing to be done, and Parkinson hastened to do it. As Chairman of the County Bench of Magistrates he ordered an immediate autopsy and inquest, summoning the District Coroner, Dr. Baker, from St. Albans. Dr. Matthews stayed to assist the coroner.

The postmortem revealed nothing. The organs of Marie's body were perfectly sound. Here was a case, too, where a coroner's customary refuge of syncope could not be pronounced. Both the doctors were absolutely mystified as to the cause of death.

Meanwhile, all customary activities at the Manor had been suspended. The guests had descended for breakfast concurrently with the arrival of the family physician, and, at the Squire's request, had assembled in the library, where they discussed the situation in deep concern. The Honourable Clive Fairfax restrained himself with difficulty from confessing his relations with the dead maid; but he reasoned with himself that no enlightenment of the mystery could possibly come of it. Besides, Marie had told him nothing, so he kept silence. In the meantime, his restlessness and concern were attributed to the shock of such a painful happening. He was really not much more perturbed than his companions in the library.

The servants were clustered here and there in groups, principally in the kitchen and butler's pantry. They, too, discussed the matter in awed whispers. As lady's maid to the mistress of the establishment, Marie had a position considered superior to some of them, with the exception perhaps of the head servants in the different departments. But, while there are always certain petty jealousies surrounding any disparity of status in the servants' hall, Marie had been generally well liked for her sunny disposition, even by the maids of the establishment.

It was not until the news filtered through to the gardens that there were any striking developments. Among the servants, the presence of the coroner had augmented the whispers about foul play, and that was how the intelligence first came to Wilson. Even before his brain had cleared from the shock, he was ready, if Marie had been murdered,

to connect the Honourable Clive Fairfax with the crime. Then, as his thoughts became less confused, he remembered the incidents of the previous evening . . . where he had waited for Marie . . . where she had been. It was more than likely that Haggerty was concerned in Marie's death. He was walking towards the house to make a statement to that effect, when he met one of the servants whom the Squire had sent to fetch him, as being the one most likely to be in a position to give some account of Marie's movements.

That idea was conveyed by the coroner's first question. "I understand, Wilson, that you were practically engaged to the dead girl," he said. "Did you see her alone yesterday?"

"I did, sir," Wilson answered.

"When was that?"

"During the evening."

"Have you any idea about what time?"

"Yes, sir. Between seven and nine o'clock."

"It was nine o'clock when you left her?"

"About nine. I couldn't say exactly. It is usually about nine o'clock that she starts to prepare her mistress's room."

"You understand, Wilson," Dr. Baker continued, "that Miss Capote's death must have been very sudden. There may, or may not be, a suggestion of foul play. I want you to disclose everything which you think might throw any light on the matter."

"I was on my way to the house to do that, sir, when you sent for me," Wilson replied.

"Then you know something about it?" the coroner questioned quickly.

"I don't know about that, sir. I only know that I met her in the Hickmanworth Copse after she had been to see the woman they call Mother Haggerty" ?

"You know she went to her . . . you are certain, I mean?"

"She admitted it . . . or rather, she didn't deny it when I told her where she had been."

"Then she did not tell you anything about her conversation with Mother Haggerty?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

The coroner picked up the empty phial. "You don't know if she obtained this there, do you?"

"This is the first time I have seen it, sir."

"You didn't go with her to the Hickmanworth Copse?"

"No, sir."

"But you knew she was going?"

"Only by the direction, sir. I hadn't arranged to meet her there. As a matter of fact, sir, I followed her."

"Rather a peculiar thing to follow the girl you are engaged to without overtaking her, wasn't it?"

"I had an idea, sir, that she might be meeting someone else."

"You expected her to do that?"

"Yes, sir. She has met him many times lately."

"Then you know who he is?"

"Yes, sir. But . . ." Wilson hesitated to mention the name of the Squire's guest. " . . . I don't think that can have

THE CORONER'S QUANDARY 73

anything to do with it. She didn't meet him. She made it up with me, sir, though I think perhaps it was only so that I wouldn't say where she had been."

"You had quarreled about it?"

"Yes, sir. Quite frequently of late."

"Wilson," the coroner said, "this other man may not know any more about it than you do, but you will have to tell me his name. She may have met him after she left you."

"That is quite possible, sir."

"You mean, it is someone else connected with the Manor," the Squire interposed.

"It is the Honourable Clive Fairfax, sir."

"The Honourable Clive Fairfax!" The Squire became almost apoplectic. "What are you talking about, man?"

"I didn't want to introduce his name, but you compelled me to, sir," Wilson answered stolidly. "Marie went so far as to tell me that he had asked her to marry him, and that she had refused."

"Preposterous!" the Squire exploded. "The Honourable Clive! Impossible!"

The coroner attempted to come to the rescue.

"Wilson may have seen the gentleman in question paying little attentions to the girl," he said. "That is more or less an honour claimed by every pretty girl, plebeian, or . . ."

"I am confident that Lord Tillingham's son would not disgrace the Manor while he is here as my guest, even to the extent of philandering with a maid," the Squire found his voice. "Wilson's unwarrantable jealousy has made him

imagine things that did not exist. If you have no further questions to ask him, Dr. Baker . . . "

"That is all now," the coroner said to Wilson. "You may be required again, so I warn you not to leave the Manor."

"It is a preposterous suggestion," Parkinson repeated, when the door had closed on Wilson. He would have said more, but he remembered suddenly that even preposterous things may happen when love is the master. Had not his own brother confessed to loving another man's wife!

"I don't for one moment imagine the Honourable Clive Fairfax can be implicated," Dr. Baker took up the thought. "At the same time, I don't think that Wilson, if he values his position here at all, would make such statements unless he at least thought he had some ground for them. If you are willing, sir, to question the gentleman yourself, I am content to leave the matter with you."

"I will do that, certainly, however distasteful it may be," the Squire replied. "At the same time, I think we are getting off the right track. This phial, and Wilson's other evidence, are clearly links in the chain pointing to Haggerty."

"So far, we have found nothing to justify a verdict of foul play," the coroner reminded him.

"Nor to justify a straight verdict of death from natural causes," Parkinson said, with renewed vigor. "I must ask you to defer your verdict pending further investigations."

"That was in my own mind," Dr. Baker replied. "Until the contents of the stomach are analysed for traces of some

THE CORONER'S QUANDARY 75

obscure poison, I am not in a position to give a verdict at all."

"There was a phial like this connected with Haggerty's love philter case six years ago," Parkinson continued.

"The suggestions of witchcraft in that case were ridiculed," the coroner reminded him. "If that is what you mean, there is nothing more tangible here. At the same time, I will admit that the services of an expert in psychic research might be valuable."

"Who could you suggest?" Parkinson asked him.

"I was thinking of Dr. Allan Crawford, the mental specialist of Harley Street. He is an active member of the Psychic Research Club in Piccadilly," Dr. Baker answered. "If you like, I'll try to get him on the telephone."

"Do," Parkinson said. Dr. Baker turned from the telephone to say that Dr. Crawford was starting for Moatlands Park immediately.

"I'll go and talk to Clive while we're waiting," the Squire added.

When he came back from his interview with Clive, he felt that the prestige of Moatlands Park had suffered renewed disgrace . . . his own dignity humiliated. For Clive not only admitted that what Wilson had said about his entanglement with Marie was correct, but had added sentiments of his own which had filled his host with disgust.

CHAPTER IX

HAGGERTY DEFIES RICHARD PARKINSON

M OATLANDS PARK is some thirty miles from Harley Street; nevertheless, Dr. Crawford arrived in less than two hours. Dr. Baker had given more details of his work in the interval. Not only was Dr. Crawford probably the most celebrated mental specialist in Harley Street, but he was also chief consulting alienist at two of London's mental hospitals. Beyond that, his activities in connection with the Psychic Research Club made him a much discussed authority on occult matters. Listening to these details, Parkinson was impatient for Dr. Crawford's arrival, and was surprised at the evident youth of so prominent a man. He welcomed him cordially.

"It was very good of you to come," he said.

"On the contrary, I am indebted to you for sending for me," Dr. Crawford replied. "My partner, Dr. Vyvyan, can easily attend to our more urgent calls for the day. What are the facts of the case, beyond what Dr. Baker was able to tell me?"

"You believe in witchcraft?" Parkinson asked him.

"To the extent that I know crime can be committed with the aid of psycho-natural means," Crawford said. "To tell

you the truth, Mr. Parkinson, sordid as it may seem, I am living for the day when I can discover a crime that has been perpetrated by witchcraft alone, as I believe it can be, though I have never hit upon an occasion. I take it that you have in mind a person named Haggerty, so-called witch queen of Hertford."

"Then you know her?"

"Not personally. She has been discussed quite a few times at the Psychic Research Club. Some of the members were detailed to make private investigation after that love philter case in which I believe, Mr. Parkinson, you were interested."

"I was not aware of their efforts," the Squire said, with quickened interest.

"They accomplished nothing; that's the reason," Crawford said. "What have you here that appears to indicate Haggerty?"

"Nothing more than an empty phial such as contained the draught in the other case, and the fact that we have evidence to prove that Marie . . . that's the girl's name . . . actually visited Haggerty on the day of her death. She admitted supplying the other, if you remember."

"Yes, I remember that; also the absolute lack of apparent motive. Is there any motive in this case?"

"So far as I know, nothing beyond her enmity towards me," Parkinson answered.

"She would hardly manifest her enmity in the destruction of a servant," Crawford observed. "I would like to see the body, if I may."

"I am sending the stomach and other organs to Scotland Yard for analysis," Dr. Baker remarked, after Crawford had examined the body with no further discovery.

"I don't think there is much to be gained by such a course," Crawford commented, "but it is about the only thing left open for you to do."

"What is there to prevent me from having Haggerty arrested in the meantime?" Parkinson demanded of them all, though his question was directed more particularly to Crawford.

"I have advised waiting until Mr. Parkinson hears the result of the official examination," Dr. Baker remarked, irritated at the Squire's repetition of what seemed to him an unwarranted procedure.

"And give her an opportunity to escape," Parkinson grumbled.

"I don't think she would take advantage of it," Crawford returned. "If she has had anything to do with it, her greatest security lies in sitting tight, in apparent indifference. If I remember rightly, that was the course she adopted in that other case."

"Old and decrepit as she is, she would not get very far if she did run," Dr. Baker added to this. "In a day every band of roving gypsies in the country could be checked up."

"For that reason I think it would be safe for me to see her before Scotland Yard meddles with the affair," Crawford went on. "I have never paid her a visit, and might learn much from a casual inspection of her haunts."

"I'll come with you," Parkinson said with alacrity. And Crawford agreed, though he would have preferred to go alone.

Parkinson immediately ordered the horses, and they rode quickly across the park to the northern extremity, taking the same route as that which had been followed by Mildred and Sir Philip. They found Haggerty engaged in her customary occupation of distilling herbs. A pot hung suspended over her fire of glowing fagots. On the rough table of her cabin was a small, crude retort, and a condenser, under the former of which a spirit lamp was burning. The door of the hovel was open, so that they could see all this before they entered. The tract of common land was entirely deserted.

Looking up to see what had cast a shadow across her threshold, she treated both her visitors to a disdainful scrutiny for a moment or two. Then she made way for them to enter, hobbling to the table with the aid of her crutch, and extinguishing the spirit lamp with an impatient gesture. It was plain she did not appreciate being disturbed.

That accomplished, she turned and made a mock obeisance before Parkinson, saying contemptuously: "So the Lord of the Manor condescends to visit the humble distiller of herbs!"

"Evidently, as we are here," Parkinson replied curtly.

"You interrupt my making of essences," Haggerty went on with equal curtness. "All my work must be done over again, but my door must be open to anyone, rich or poor, who cares to hear the divinations of the stars."

Haggerty had turned her face away while she was speaking, and Parkinson intercepted a glance from Crawford.— It stopped him from making a caustic remark when it was on the point of his tongue. During their ride across the park Crawford had explained to him what he wished him to do in order to aid the investigation. Principally, if possible, her suspicions must not be aroused concerning the real reason of their visit. Parkinson had become firmly convinced by this time that Haggerty was responsible for Marie's death. Haggerty, then, would know that Marie was dead, and, knowing that, it surprised him that she could speak so indifferently, prophesying evil against himself, for that is what she did immediately afterwards, turning to him again before he had thought of anything different to say.

"You are not a welcome visitor, Richard Parkinson," she said. "You would do well to leave before I tell you the evil that is coming to you."

"Evil or good, I have come for the purpose of having you tell it to me," he forced himself to say in reply.

"You have come too late for the evil to be averted," Haggerty returned crisply; and added, with ill-concealed venom: "Even now, if I could with truth prophesy good for you or your accursed house, my lips would be sealed. I am but the handmaiden of Fate, and must speak the truth; but I am glad . . . my hatred of you is strong enough . . . to make me glad that I shall hurt you."

Crawford, too, then began to wonder. Steeped as his mind was in the possible malignant influences of the occult

as wielded by such a creature as she, he had been prepared to find evidences of her guilt. There was nothing in her attitude to foster such a supposition; either that, or she was capable of a callousness towards her crimes which was more than super-human. To say the least of it, if she were aware of Marie's death—if she alone was responsible—it was startling to hear her raving against the man who she could only conclude had come to accuse her of instrumentality, and that on another matter which had no connection whatsoever with the crime . . . seeking afresh to arouse his enmity, and careless of the fact that her hatred of him was voiced in the presence of a third person.

And Parkinson was beginning to quake with a strange fear, though but a few-hours ago he would have scorned the suggestion that he could be impressed by anything malevolent she could say. Perhaps it was because of the dastardly crime he believed she had committed, and which she ignored while she breathed her malice against himself, stopping only once in her utterance to rebuke the raven in the Romaní tongue, for the bird had commenced to accompany her words with raucous croakings of its own. Perhaps it was because he was conscious of some hypnotizing force emanating from her beady eyes as she looked scornfully at him . . . and people said she possessed the evil eye! He was nauseatingly conscious that she had set about compelling him to believe what she would say. He tried to subdue the fear within him that had grown so perceptible in, as it were, a moment's space, as he said: "Whatever your prophecy, woman, I hardly expected consideration at your hands."

Haggerty laughed harshly at that, and checked herself to again-rebuke the raven into silence.

"Haven't I good cause to hate you, Richard Parkinson?" she demanded. "I am an old woman . . . old and defenceless. You tried to bring me before your courts of law without any just cause . . . because of an accident when I tried to give a service. You would have had me turned from my dwelling, but could not because my home is on land which cannot be touched. You would have had me branded as a witch because I understand a few properties of herbs, and can read the stars. I tell you," she continued vindictively, "that the fires of hatred in my heart have never smouldered. I am old, and I might forget, so I keep them kindled with fresh fagots as I do my fire."

Parkinson writhed against the nauseating sensation compelled by her virulent gaze, but found himself impotent to cast off the spell she seemed intent upon fixing upon him. Words came to his tongue, but were replaced by the question: "What is this evil you would croak about?"

"I take my time," Haggerty answered carelessly. "I have waited years to tell you what the stars have told to me, and I shall make but a small demand upon your patience. Besides, my lamp is out, and my essences are spoiled."

"A plague on your essences," Parkinson muttered.

"Curse me rather than curse them," Haggerty returned quickly, and in evident anger. "The herbs are gifts to those who know how to use them. They grow in abundance here in these woods, but it requires wisdom to choose between the

good and the bad. Some of them I use to purify my vision, so that the horoscopes I trace in the stars will not lie."

"Or pollute it so that you may see the evil your wicked heart dictates!" Parkinson forced himself to utter.

Accusation of wickedness appeared to amuse rather than anger her, but she maintained her harsh tones as she said: "No need for pollution when I read your destiny, Richard Parkinson. Many, many times have I traced your horoscope in the planets, and verified the finding with sands and crystal. Every time I have seen nothing but death and disaster, insanity and corruption, falling upon your house . . . your proud head leveled to the dust!"

"You whining hag . . . you lie!" Parkinson exclaimed against that strange conviction which was settling so firmly upon him. Turning to Crawford, he demanded fiercely: "Are you satisfied now that she has given you the evidence you want? This chemical apparatus . . . this distilling of herbs! Are they not sufficient evidence that she is manufacturing some form of subtle poison, known only to her infernal wickedness?"

Haggerty looked at him while he was speaking, but her wrinkled face lost none of its composure, nor did she cease her hideous, cackling laughter.

Crawford saw that it was time he came to Parkinson's assistance. He had lost nothing of Haggerty's efforts at making the Squire susceptible to her magnetic influence, and did not blame him for charging her so abruptly with nefarious designs. He had remained an inconspicuous observer,

content that Haggerty ignored his presence. Now he stepped forward.

"You speak of separating noxious herbs from those that are beneficial to humanity," he said. "It would be a terrible thing if you made a mistake."

Haggerty showed her consciousness of him then for the first time. She subjected him to a searching scrutiny as she replied. "I am old," she said then, "but it is only my body that is infirm. My eyes are keen, and I am not likely to forget the wisdom I have learnt during more years than I can count. The herbs I use are harmless elements, though I have knowledge to employ them in filters and elixirs. By means of them love can be encouraged through sparkling eyes; youth can be made perpetual by"

She ceased speaking suddenly, bending upon Crawford a more searching scrutiny than before. As it were for the first time, she realized that she was face to face with a man possessing as dynamic a will power as her own; for Crawford met her gaze unflinchingly, which was what few people could do. Her beady eyes became contracted almost to pin points as she struggled to remain mistress of the situation. "What do you mean by a mistake?" she demanded, with a further assumption of ignorance of the reason of their visit which was amazing.

"Can you recall no mistakes which have justified Mr. Parkinson in his attitude towards you?" Crawford asked quietly in turn. Then, as she did not answer immediately, he added: "Are you sure there was nothing harmful in the

concoction you gave yesterday to one of the maids at the Manor?"

"One of them came to me, and I gave her the 'Elixir of Youth' ", Haggerty answered, with well-assumed astonishment at the question.

"In this bottle?" Crawford continued, showing her the bottle which he had taken from Marie's dressing-table.

"It is one of my bottles," she said, without any attempt at dissimulation. Knowing that Wilson had met Marie, it was useless to deny it. In spite of her promises, there was every possibility that Marie had shown it to the gardener. She added: "But why . . . why do you ask me such a thing? There was nothing in it but such as I am brewing now in my pot . . . harmless elements."

"The girl is dead," Crawford said briefly.

"What do you mean?" Haggerty blustered.

"Exactly what I say," Crawford answered. "Would you have us believe I am telling you something you did not know?"

"How should I know?" Haggerty asked again. "My herbs are harmless"

"It may rest with you to prove they are harmless, and perhaps with less success this time," Parkinson interrupted her impatiently. "It is known that she came to you. You admit that this bottle contained a potion you gave her to drink. Analysis will prove whether that potion contained a harmful element or not . . . whether your concoctions are as harmless as you say. Perhaps then you will turn to the excuse my friend here offered you . . . turn to your age as

an alibi, and claim that you made an error in your prescription . . . that"

Haggerty laughed scornfully, derisively. Then she checked herself, as if struck by a sudden thought.

"Perhaps you may find poison," she said. "There was no other reason why she should have died. She was well enough when she came here. But you will not find that poison in my liquors. Take what you will find of them to try. The prescription is the same. The girl who is dead never did me any harm, so why should I hurt her? If I wanted to strike a blow at you, Richard Parkinson—and I could do so—I should strike at someone of your blood. I have had opportunity to do that, and have not."

"What do you mean?" the Squire demanded.

"Presently, I will tell you," she answered. "There are other things which come first. If you want to find someone who might wish to commit such a crime as you would accuse me of, look to someone who might have a spite against her. Look to her noble lover, who may have tired of his pleasure with her, and found her in the way! Or the gardener who was insane with jealousy because of her noble lover's attentions! There perhaps you will find cause for murder, but not here in my humble dwelling; though you may search it if you wish. If you take possession of all that you may find here, it will only add to the hatred which I have told your courts of law, and would tell them again, is in my heart for you!"

For a moment Parkinson did not know what to say to this. There was so much of truth in what she so strangely

knew. Of that he did not stop to think. Her words recalled with startling vividness the painful interview he had so recently had with his guest. The fact that Clive had admitted his infatuation for the dead servant made any termination to Wilson's jealousy possible.

Meanwhile, Crawford also remaining silent, Haggerty added: "You may gain power over me by your lying accusations, Richard Parkinson. You may even persuade your courts of law that I am guilty. But think not then to escape from my vengeance. The secrets of life and death are revealed to me by the stars. Soon, whether through you or not, I shall pass beyond this cycle of years, yet I shall live again to curse you. I shall see the time come when you will go down to the grave an imbecile because of your fear of me. When your daughter is born . . ."

"You lie, you hag! You lie!" he said vehemently.

Haggerty never lost her wicked composure before his threatening gesture. She had yet to deliver a blow which, leveled against his pride in his untarnished lineage, was even more terrible than the other.

"Ask your wife if what I say is not true," she said. "She knows. Ask her lover! They came to me together!"

Stumbling like a man who has been stunned, Parkinson made a movement towards her with his riding crop raised. But Haggerty did not yield her ground, and his arm remained motionless under the spell she cast upon him with her unrelenting eyes. All he could do was to stammer, just as Sir Philip had stammered when she had held him by the same impervious force, incoherently . . . with voice lacking

88 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

vitality: "Cease your damnable lies . . . your infernal croaking!"

"Ask her lover . . . your brother . . . Sir Philip Parkinson!" Haggerty threw at him with withering scorn.

If he had been stunned before, he was irrevocably crushed now. Into his mind came the remembrance of the evening of Sir Philip's last visit to the Manor . . . his pleading for Mildred's rights to conjugal reciprocity! He remembered his brother's admission that the woman he loved . . . who stood in the way of his ever marrying . . . was the wife of another man. Fool that he had been not to see the connection between Sir Philip's concern and his infatuation for Mildred. Many things came to his dazed mind, fraught with staggering possibilities. Sir Philip had arrived as he was leaving—perhaps a few minutes too soon. There were other times when he had been absent for whole days, while his attitude did not encourage confidences on the part of his servants.

And this creature, into whose hands he had been sold by every member of his family! What could he do further against her while she could, with the faintest whisper of the things she had revealed to him, and which in spite of himself he could not but believe, dash the prestige and honour of the House of Parkinson in the mire?

He was hardly conscious of Crawford's touch on his arm as he was led outside the filthy hovel, reeling like a drunken man.

They had barely departed when Michello cautiously approached the hovel from the shelter of the timber, and en-

tered. Haggerty expected him, but she was calm. That calmness reassured him somewhat, yet he asked breathlessly: "They found nothing?"

"No, but they will," his mother answered.

"Will? . . . How?" he demanded.

"I wanted to make doubly sure," she said, without faltering. "I didn't expect the girl's visit would be known. I added . . ."

"Not poison?" Michello was staggered.

"Yes . . . poison," she said.

"You infernal fool!" he reviled her. Then, softening, he went on: "There is time to escape. Come!"

She resisted his compelling hand. "It is you who are the fool, Michello," she said. "I have read the stars, and know that I shall live to see the end of the accursed Parkinsons. If they fail me, I shall go into the grave, but not by way of the gallows. The secret I have explained to you . . ."

Michello shuddered as he asked her: "You are not afraid of failure?"

"I have read the stars, and they do not lie," was all she would vouchsafe in way of answer.

CHAPTER X

PARKINSON ACCUSES HIS WIFE OF INFIDELITY

THERE was very little said between Parkinson and Crawford during their return ride across the park. Parkinson rode in front as if to avoid conversation, and Crawford followed well content with silence. Haggerty's revelation concerning the domestic relations at Moatlands Park were a turn of events he had in no wise anticipated. He almost wished there would be no need to continue investigations, not that he expected to discover very much in any case. The chances of proving anything against Haggerty were very small indeed. There was no doubt in his mind that she was an exponent of some form of witchcraft—some occult influence. He believed it was an art still practised, though from previous investigations he knew it was something very difficult to establish. In his opinion, Parkinson would be wise to let the matter drop—to give the coroner a free hand to return an open verdict of death from natural causes. He suggested it tentatively as they neared the Manor, but Parkinson turned the suggestion down with scorn.

"There is at least one Parkinson who has some honour left," he said. "I am convinced that that creature was responsible for Marie's death, and I would not allow her to

go unpunished even should it mean the shattering of every vestige of my pride. You have heard the accusations she made against my wife . . my brother . . and "

"I hope I need not assure you that I was an unwilling auditor," Crawford interrupted him. "I shall treat the matter as if the confidence were your own."

"Thank you," Parkinson replied, adding: "Silence on your part, however, won't close Haggerty's mouth. You will please me best if you continue your investigations without considering my prestige at all."

"It would be better to keep Scotland Yard out of the affair at present," Crawford went on. "I will take a swab of the girl's stomach and intestines to Sir Victor Norton. If her death was due to the introduction of anything malignant, no matter how obscure it is, I know of no one more competent than he to discover it."

Meanwhile, the period of her husband's absence had been well-nigh intolerable to Mildred. Knowing where he had gone, it required no small effort to brace herself to continue the functions of hostess to her guests. In obedience to her commands, the frightened domestics prepared a belated breakfast, at which she presided with magnificent fortitude. It was, at the best, a caricature of a meal. Clive, with a lack of appetite which is not surprising, had preferred to remain in the library.

Squire Barfleet was deeply moved by the suggestions of witchcraft which had filtered through. There were incidents in his own family legends connected with the black arts. Remotely of Scottish descent, he claimed relationship

with past generations of ruling Douglasses, and, as everyone who reads history knows, workers of magic played an important part in their uprising and their downfall. He jumped readily to the conclusion that Moatlands Park had developed into an unhealthy locality, and was anxious to speed his departure. Lord Tillingham heartily agreed with him. They broached the subject to Parkinson on his return, and he made no effort to gainsay them.

Parkinson avoided any tête-à-tête conversation with his wife. Etiquette demanded the avoidance of any emotional scene while his guests were still under his roof. But Mildred sensed Richard's frigid attitude towards herself, and she could easily surmise what Haggerty had told her husband. In her anger at Richard's enquiries, the hag would say detestable things to him . . . would tell of her visit, linking her name with that of Sir Philip as lovers . . . taunting Richard with the approaching birth of a daughter!

She wished Moira would leave her, so that she could fling herself down somewhere and cry until she was too exhausted to think. She could not have told afterwards how she kept up . . . through the farce of sitting at luncheon; through an afternoon of compulsory propinquity with her husband's guests; then dinner, with an interminable evening ahead. When she was able to retire, she was too exhausted even to cry. Richard did not go near her that night. In the morning he accompanied his guests to St. Albans, where they were to take their trains.

Left to herself, Mildred wanted to get out of sight of the house. She could not even face the rose gardens, with

their memories of Sir Philip's ardor. So she walked northwards through the park, to a knoll covered with beech trees, and sat on the mossy grass on the far side of it. For a time she sobbed there, with her face buried in her hands, thinking, among other things, of that small life within herself which, if Haggerty's predictions came true, would be her final catastrophe. When she looked up again she was not alone.

Before her stood the gypsy girl Miranda. A different Miranda, not at first recognized, because she was habited in something quite different to the bedraggled garments in which she had seen her before. Indeed, it was not until Miranda spoke that Mrs. Parkinson was sure.

"I am very sad, too, fair lady, but it hurts me to see you weep," Miranda said.

The Mistress of Moatlands Park was too astonished at the girl's audacity to speak; and before she could summon her voice, Miranda had thrown herself on her knees before her.

"I have come to you because I am in great trouble, fair lady," she pleaded. "You make me a promise . . ."

Mildred interrupted her impatiently. "I am in too great trouble myself to discuss that now."

"You *must* discuss it," Miranda insisted. "It is because your maid is dead that Mother Haggerty will kill me."


"What have you to do with that?" Mildred questioned.

"The gentleman . . . your husband . . . yesterday accuse Mother Haggerty of killing her. She thinks I told about the little bottle."

Mildred stared at her. She faltered the question: "You think Mother Haggerty killed her . . Marie?"

Miranda answered tearfully: "I don't know. She tell me she give her the Elixir of Youth, and I am afraid of her elixirs. She has beat me already. I come to you because I am frightened she kill me. I have bruises to show . . like these." And, after glancing around, Miranda lifted her skirts, and Mildred saw, to her undisguised dismay, a mass of disfiguring, multi-coloured bruises on her bare thighs and hips.

"But your parents . . !" Mildred began.



"I have no parents, fair lady. The gypsies took me when I was little, and I do not know my real name. I am not a gypsy. Miranda is only what they call me. Mother Haggerty keep me because she think she can teach me to have second sight."

"Second sight?" Mildred queried.

"So she calls it, noble lady. She look at me for one minute with her black eyes, and I fall into a trance. Then I see lots of things, in the present, past and future . . what she command me to see. She tell you she read the stars. Sometimes she does, but not always. It was I saw that you would have a baby girl, but it wasn't my fault. Sometimes I remember the things I tell her. That was why I thought the gallant gentleman who came with you was your cavalier, until I read your palm. I remembered seeing him with you . . in a garden of roses. He was kneeling beside you, kissing your hand. He tell you . . "

"Stop!" Mildred commanded, aghast at this source of Haggerty's information, and thinking anew of what Haggerty could have told Richard.

"You will keep your promise, fair lady," Miranda pleaded. She had started to cry again, and Mildred saw no duplicity in her agonized tears. "I will be safe if you keep me here, where she cannot see me."

"Keep you here? Girl, that is impossible! I am in trouble enough now, without having it said that I am hiding one of that woman's . . ."

"There are many things I can do," Miranda persisted. "Would you not let me wait on you . . . do the things that . . ."

Mrs. Parkinson gazed at her incredulously, but it was evident Miranda was serious.

"Listen, noble lady," she went on. "There are many things I can do. I am clever with my fingers, and you could teach me what I do not know. In London, in Tottenham Court Road, I used to tell fortunes. Not as Miranda the gypsy, but as Madame Lois Delarge. Sometimes the great ladies have come to me to arrange their hair, for I do it so beautifully. Sometimes I have stayed with them for several days, when they wanted me to tell the fortunes of their friends. The gypsies had taught me to do it, because it brought in much money. And Mother Haggerty has taught me secrets which make a fair lady keep young, so that her husband will worship her. If he does not, I can make him," she finished vehemently.

That was the strongest argument she had yet produced

for Mildred. She began to waver. "You might pass for French," she mused.

"But I was born in France, gracious lady," Miranda assured her.

"You will have to cease calling me 'gracious lady'. And your clothes! You will have to wear some decent undergarments, and your dresses will have to be black."

"*Mais oui, Madame,*" Miranda replied, with an accent that might have passed for Marie's own. "I have money to buy all I need."

"~~Then come to me tomorrow at the Manor,~~" Mildred said. "I will make it known that I am expecting you. Try to avoid being seen as you leave the park. It must be understood that you have finished with the gypsies entirely," she continued. "If you make any attempt to go near them, it will mean instant dismissal from my service."

"Madame need not be afraid," Miranda said, with a shudder. "I hate them! I have no gypsy blood in me, as I tell Madame. The color of my skin was through stain. Madame will see that it is already wearing off."

Looking closely at her, Mildred observed that her skin was indeed fairer. It did not occur to her that the change might have been effected by another of Haggerty's preparations.

Richard returned from St. Albans soon after Mildred reached the house. She was waiting for him in the library, to which room he was practically certain to first turn his steps. He hesitated when he saw her sitting there, but she motioned to him to enter.

"I waited here for you, Richard," she said simply.

"You were expecting I should have something to say?" he asked curtly.

"Quite naturally, I imagine," she replied. "Since yesterday I have had to be content with the filtered scraps of information which reached me through Lady Tillingham or Moira. You have not told me if you discovered any real cause for poor Marie's death."

"There is very little I can tell you . . . about Marie," he returned. ~~"Probably the filtered scraps of information you have heard embrace the whole subject matter."~~

"You forget, Richard, that it is not wise that I . . . be kept in a state of suspense which is unendurable!"

Richard laughed . . . contemptuously, she thought. And his words added scorn that lashed her like a whip.

"Contrary to what historians would have us believe, Mildred, suspense never kills. Sometimes, I might add, unfortunately."

"Richard! What do you mean?"

He started to laugh again, but was checked by the look of agonizing appeal that crossed her features. In spite of himself, the thought occurred to him suddenly that Haggerty might be wrong, or might be deliberately lying. His attitude was one he should not have adopted until he had taken other measures to ascertain the truth, although Mildred's anxiety appeared to point to her guilt. His manner remained rigid, however, as he answered: "I mean that people in our position do not allow any emotion to override their reasoning faculties."

"Oh, yes," she replied bitterly. "You would remind me again that by marriage I am a Parkinson! But I haven't your indifferent fortitude. I am a woman, and . . . expect to become a mother . . . I . . . and you . . . have our child to consider."

"Our child?" he queried, stiffening more.

"Richard!"

"I am fully aware of the cause for the suspense of which you spoke. You knew where I went yesterday with Dr. Crawford. You would hardly expect reticence from your charming gypsy acquaintance, would you? Unfortunately, Dr. Crawford was an auditor of her startling announcements."

Mildred said nothing... could say nothing. With throbbing heart she waited for him to continue.

"You have forced this interview, and we will get through it as quickly as possible," he went on. "It will be painful for both of us, but you are cognizant of the fact that there are a few matters which need to be straightened out."

"The interview may be shortened if you will come to the point, and say what justification you have for your present attitude," she faltered.

"Pretence of ignorance was hardly a trait I expected in you," he sneered. "Need I say that prevarication does not become you, Mildred?"

"Richard! You are unjust to accuse me of such a thing!" she exclaimed.

"Your sense of injustice is rather distorted," he re-

turned mercilessly. "After all, prevarication with the lips would not be more undignified than living a lie."

"Richard! How dare you? If you want an explanation of my visit to Haggerty, I can give it."

"That is one point at which we need to arrive," he said.

"Then remember," she replied, "you are not badgering information from some unfortunate prisoner in the dock. I am your wife, and am entitled to a fair, unbiased hearing . . . to more consideration than you have ever shown me, except during the past few months, when the presence of guests in the house has made that imperative for the preservation of your own dignity."

"Your explanation, please," he said tersely. "I am accustomed to receiving testimony on its own merits, without being prejudiced from having heard it first from another source."

"Not knowing exactly what you have heard, I . . ."

"Suppose you start with your visit to Haggerty, in direct refutation of my authority as your husband."

"I went to her because . . . it is said that she can foretell coming happenings. She had already told you that you would never have a son. I had discovered that I might be with child, and I wished to ascertain, if I could, by showing her kindness, if what she had said had been merely the outcome of your attitude towards her. I did not ask her to observe secrecy, as your words just now implied. She rejected my advances with contempt, because of you. But even that was better than living all the intervening months in agonizing

suspense, not knowing what was to be my fate. It was even worth risking your anger for that."

"The satisfaction you would get from her would hardly be commensurate with your expectations," Richard commented drily.

"At least . . . I knew," Mildred replied.

"You knew nothing," her husband retorted. "There, the wretched woman was lying. The Parkinson firstborn has always been a son. I have never demanded anything but a son."

"I have never had any opportunity to forget that, Richard. Have I not all through these years been harassed by your reiterated demand for a son? Has it not been constantly dinned into my ears that the supreme duty of a Parkinson wife was to repeat the family history by giving birth first to a male child? I knew then . . . I still know . . . how you would despise me if I gave birth to a daughter as Haggerty had prophesied, and—in those few days before my hopes became a certainty—I had learned that to a mother her child comes first, before her husband."

"Especially if there are doubts as to whether the child belongs to her husband!" he flung at her.

"Richard!" she gasped. "You dare to say . . . ?"

"Perhaps you have an equally good explanation for Philip's interest in the matter?" Richard's tone was cutting.

"He was interested only so far as my condition affected his own right of succession to the estate," Mildred answered.

"I suppose you will tell me next that *you* were worrying about his right of succession, giving that as your reason for

disclosing your condition to him even before you made me acquainted with it," Richard said bitterly.

"Philip was here, and I cajoled him into giving me his escort. I couldn't go alone. Also, as I could not interview Mother Haggerty alone, I had to take him into my confidence."

"You expect me to believe that he had to be told?" Richard stormed. ~~"Well, listen to the facts as I have them.~~ You receive Philip here as your lover during my absence. Unknown to me he may have come, not once, but many times."

Her agonized: "Richard! Stop!" was unheeded by him. He continued relentlessly: "He is going away, and you and he both wish to know if your amours will fructify, so you take the most undignified step of all . . . you go to consult that infernal witch, and leave her to . . . not only conclude . . . but broadcast that Philip is your lover.

"Before he left here to accept that position in the Balkans, he confessed to me that he was in love with another man's wife. God! It was natural he shouldn't say whose wife! It was some days after his departure, when your expectations became a certainty, that you admitted your condition to me . . . when you could no longer avoid doing so. Following the revelations of that loathsome hag, would you expect me to place any other construction upon such a train of circumstances? Shall I tell you a toast he drank before he left? Mocking me, he drank it . . . for it was I who suggested it, hoping to induce him to marry, and pro-

vide an heir to the House of Parkinson. "Here's to his speedy advent, whether he be my son . . or yours! "

"Richard!" Mildred said again, with rising anger now. "Philip *was* referring to the child I am to bear, but not because he . . . "

"Do you deny that he is in love with you?" Richard interrupted her.

"I am not going to do that," she answered. "He does love me, but that is no sin of mine. I am not responsible for his love, which I do not return, except such love as is due to him as your brother. If your opinion of your wife is so small that you can imagine she would become the mistress of another man, Philip is never likely to forget that he is a gentleman. Richard!" she walked towards him now. "No matter what you think of me, there is one thing you *must* believe, or I shall go insane. You alone are the father of my child. Even though you may ultimately turn my love for you to hate, I have never loved any man but you. If you kill me with your cruelty . . . that I can forgive; but if you torture me with your unjust suspicions until you destroy the child God has not yet fully given to me, I shall hate you until the last breath I draw, and will bring curses upon you more terrible than Haggerty, with all her wickedness, has been able to pronounce!"

As she stood there before him with her hands upraised, as if she would invoke those curses, the force engendered by the intensity of her passion held him, as one appalled. There was something unearthly—transcendently spiritual—in the power that appeared to emanate from her. For the second

time in two days had a woman held him in defiance, one invoking calamity, the other threatening the same.

The strange effect of her words was only momentary, however. He remembered that she was his wife . . his chattel . . this woman defying him. He would have taken an angry stride towards her, had the movement not been interrupted by a discreet knock at the door.

"Come in!" he said curtly, turning to face the servant who entered. "What is it, Jacobs?"

"Your pardon, sir!" the footman replied, "But Dr. Crawford has just arrived, and is asking to see you on important business, sir."

"If you will excuse me?" Parkinson turned to his wife with a resumption of the dignity of the Lord of the Manor. Without waiting for her reply, he said to the servant: "Show Dr. Crawford in here!"

Mildred, feeling she had been dismissed with less courtesy than a domestic, left the library before Dr. Crawford entered.

CHAPTER XI

SUSPENDED ANIMATION

PARDON me if I intrude, Mr. Parkinson," Crawford said. "I have received intelligence which would not permit of delay. Here is the result of Sir Victor Norton's analysis. He has discovered minute traces of a subtle poison unknown to medical science generally, sufficient to warrant your proceeding at once with Haggerty's arrest."

"It was good of you to come," Parkinson returned. "I am afraid, if it is merely a case of poisoning, that I have already encroached unnecessarily upon your time."

"Not at all. I don't know of any pathologist other than Sir Victor Norton who would have succeeded in isolating the poison at all. The case cannot be kept out of the hands of Scotland Yard any longer, and Sir Victor's evidence concerning the presence of that particular poison will be sufficient to procure Haggerty's conviction. It will satisfy Scotland Yard, but it doesn't exactly satisfy me. Taken by itself, there was not sufficient poison to cause instant death by itself. It is one of those strange psycho-natural deaths . . . I think I mentioned them before . . . which are so intriguingly puzzling. There is still a wide field of investigation left open. That

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is my reason for coming in person rather than sending a telephone message. I want to gather what material I can at the time she is arrested, before police interference has made that impossible. Could you have her arrest effected while I am here?"

Parkinson telephoned at once for a police van from Hertford to come to them at Haggerty's hovel, and ordered his own horse. In ten minutes they were on their way.

They found the tract of common land deserted, and Haggerty alone. Crawford's impression of her was that she had aged still more in the few intervening hours. Her words, which she addressed to Parkinson, confirmed the impression.

"What evil you want to do to me will have to be done quickly," she said. "My days are numbered."

"I have brought a warrant for your arrest on the charge of murder," the Squire told her. "Traces of the poison you used have been found, and the law compels me to advise you to say nothing which might be used in evidence against you. You will have every opportunity to prove your innocence."

"What I say is my own affair, Richard Parkinson," Haggerty replied calmly, "and I don't expect my words to influence your courts of law. I have read my destiny in the stars, and know that for once you will be too powerful for me. But my curse will follow you from the grave, and my revenge will be the downfall of the House of Parkinson. Because of me, insanity and corruption shall descend upon your house. You will go to your own grave an imbecile because of me. Your unborn daughter . . ."

"Silence, hag!" Parkinson interrupted her. She looked

straight at him without recoiling a single step before his threatening attitude.

"Your unborn daughter," she finished her sentence, "shall be the last of your blood, and she shall not see the sun rise on her eighteenth birthday."

"My daughter?" he questioned sarcastically.

"Because your brother is your wife's lover does not mean that she was faithless to you," Haggerty said. "I tell you this truth because I know the birth of that daughter will hurt you more, knowing she is yours."

What else might have been said was prevented by the entrance of a police sergeant and two constables. Parkinson handed the sergeant his warrant, and instructed him to take his prisoner away. Haggerty offered no resistance as they hustled her towards the waiting Black Maria.

One of the constables remained to guard the contents of the hovel, which Crawford examined minutely. There were numerous crude retorts, condensers, and phials filled with herbal essences, but he found nothing of the nature he was seeking. Disappointed, he returned to Moatlands Park with the Squire.

As before, Parkinson did not appear to be anxious for conversation. He was brooding over the things Haggerty had told him, her quiet words producing greater conviction in his mind than her vituperation before. He could feel her gimlet-like eyes boring their way into his brain, making him believe. She had spoken to him of insanity; somehow he felt it would come, he couldn't tell why, unless . . . if the child should be a daughter! Haggerty was correct when she sug-

gested that as the worst blow he could experience. She had spoken of an influence she would exert upon him from beyond the grave! He turned to ask Crawford about that, and was not very comforted by his answer.

"That is the common belief of spiritualists," Crawford told him.

"That the dead can influence the living?" Parkinson stammered.

"It depends upon one's comprehension of what is dead. The body dies, but the soul lives . . . is the teaching of religion. Belief in the spiritual is something shared in different degrees by all men, savage or civilized. Without it religion would be less than a farce. In fact, it is the foundation of all religion, whether Christian or Pagan," Crawford enlarged the idea. "You believe it; I believe it. Everybody does, willingly or unwillingly. How far a spiritualistic influence can go is a different matter, but the theories of scientists in that respect are not all hokus. There is one thing, however, that I can tell you from first-hand observation. Communication with the departed is only manifested in those who place themselves in a distinctly receptive attitude. You would hardly do that where Haggerty is concerned."

"Hardly," Parkinson agreed, unconvinced.

"In having her arrested, you have done all that duty calls upon you to do," Crawford went on. "Let some other magistrate commit her for trial, and try to forget about her."

"My evidence . . ." Parkinson began.

108 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

"Is the only connection you need have with the case," Crawford finished for him. He added: "If I may, Mr. Parkinson, I should like to give you a little advice. You must eradicate the morbid impression Haggerty has made upon you. If you foster that impression by brooding over it, you will make yourself particularly susceptible."

"Twice you heard her mention insanity," Parkinson grumbled. "Do you think there was nothing in that?"

"There was a whole lot in it, but there is no reason why it should materialize. There is nothing in the annals of your family to warrant it, but, as an alienist, I can tell you that one of the most poignant causes of insanity is fear. And, pardon me, at the present moment you are exhibiting fear of Haggerty."

"I am," the Squire admitted.

"Then get the fear of Haggerty out of your thoughts, and there is no reason why you should be influenced by her, either dead or living."

It depended upon the accuracy of her predictions, Parkinson thought. Well, it was now only a matter of a few weeks before the fate of the Parkinsons would be revealed.


There was no funeral from Moatlands Park, as Scotland Yard took possession of the body. For a few days after its removal, Parkinson busied himself with the orchids, trying to eliminate Haggerty from his thoughts. The experiment was hardly successful. Neither could the orchids eradicate the gnawing that harassed his soul from morning till night . . . his dreams when he did manage to sleep. Only a few days, but even days will at times stretch themselves into eternities.

Sometimes, when the doubt assailed him more violently than usual, he wished he had asked Crawford. Crawford was probably an astrologer himself, and could have verified or nullified Haggerty's predictions. Parkinson laughed ironically as he recalled the time when he would have scoffed at anything pertaining to the reading of one's destiny in the stars, as if the movements of the planets in the vast infinity of space could control the destinies of mortals! But he laughed at his own former disbelief. A few facts—a few happenings—and the whole tone of his belief was changed. There were moments, of course, when it seemed equally inconceivable that he, of the whole line of Parkinsons, should be the one to bear the stigma of being the father of a daughter instead of a son.

If Mildred should give birth to a daughter! That would be a proof of the accuracy of Haggerty's predictions, and, in spite of what encouragement Crawford might still try to give him, that would leave him a prey to the belief that in all particulars her prophecies might be fulfilled. Let her but fail in this—let the first of her prophecies prove to be without foundation—then, and only then, could his mind be easy concerning the rest. That was the only thought with which he could occasionally sustain himself.

If Haggerty had spoken the truth in one particular, she had also lied in another. Where had she spoken the truth, and where had she lied? That was another cankerworm that gnawed at his vitals incessantly. Somewhere, she had learned that the birth of a daughter would mean more to him than the shattering of his family traditions. Years before

she had told him he would never have a son. What conclusion could he draw should Mildred's child be a man-child? Would that be additional proof that Haggerty's predictions were false, or would it justify what she had previously said concerning the intimacy of the relations between Mildred and Sir Philip, part of which his brother had admitted and Mildred had corroborated? Savagely he strangled the hope that the child might be a girl! Better for family traditions to sink than that.



Haggerty had begun his demoralization; perplexity was finishing it already. Even in that she had been correct. She had prophesied that he would be insane when he died . . . insane! . . . a calamity which had never befallen a Parkinson in a whole genealogy of well-balanced succession! The arguments against it were equally well-founded in his case. That line had been too free from taint—the marriages too well selected. Besides, had not his own life, his own activities, been too well organized for that? No! He could not be losing his reason. It was the worry . . . the unceasing anxiety . . . the devitalizing perplexity . . . these were destroying his equipoise, and shattering his nerves.

Sometimes he badgered Dr. Matthews, the family physician, with questions which the latter found it difficult to answer. Dr. Matthews was a physician of the old school, satisfied to minister to sickness and childbirth without probing too deeply into the mysterious secrets of Nature. Moreover, he was a churchwarden, and had great faith in the orthodox teachings of the Established Church.

"These things are solely in the hands of Providence," he told Parkinson, almost apologetically. His fees from Moatlands Park took the form more of monthly emoluments than set charges for specific services. So far as his conscience allowed him, he would have liked to pander to the Squire's prejudices.

"Providence be hanged!" Parkinson exploded. "Do you know of any reason why it shouldn't be a son!"

"There is always equal chance of . . ." Matthews began.

"Equal fiddlesticks! Did not my father have a son when I was born? Hasn't the firstborn of the Parkinsons always been a son? Why should I be different?"

"That, sir, is hardly a logical argument." For once Dr. Matthews felt his choler rising at remarks which were aimed at his professional knowledge. "There has certainly been a remarkable series of coincidences. It may be all right so far as it concerns you, but, you must remember, there is the mother element to considered."

"What has that got to do with it?" Parkinson demanded.

"It might make all the difference in the world. The functions of procreation . . ."

"All this talk about Providence and procreation gets us nowhere," the Squire said bitterly.

"Neither will the impatience you are exhibiting," the doctor replied. "You are wearing your nerves out worrying about something which time alone can reveal. There are other things which you might better worry about, if you will allow me to speak plainly."

"What, pray?" the Squire asked.

"Your worrying is reacting upon Mrs. Parkinson in a way that might be dangerous to her in her condition," Matthews answered. "Her nerves are in a terrible state. I intended to tell you this today before I left, because it rests with you to lift her from the despair into which she was plunged by the unfortunate death of her maid. A husband can do much that a doctor cannot. The best tonic she could possibly have right now would be to see you cheerful and smiling."

"You mean . . . there is possible danger to the child?"

"I am thinking of both mother and child. If you want to keep both . . ."

"We are entering into a perilous discussion," Parkinson said haughtily. And Dr. Matthews, knowing something of the light in which Parkinson viewed his wife, refrained from saying anything more, feeling that he had at least done his duty in bringing the matter to the Squire's notice.

But his words had more effect than he had hoped for. Parkinson went to see his wife, almost for the first time since Haggerty's arrest. As yet he felt no qualms of conscience because he had left her in suspense—suspense as to whether he believed her declaration of faithfulness to himself or not. It was not so much of his wife that he was thinking as of the child which had to be safeguarded.

"I am not worrying because you care so little for me that you never come near me, Richard," Mildred told him. "You have never loved me, and I don't expect you ever will. But I meant what I told you before. If by your harshness you destroy the life of my child, I will never forgive you."

There was still another month before the Assize Court would be held, and he left his wife wondering again how he was going to retain his faculties until Haggerty was finally disposed of. Temporary relief came earlier than he expected, however. Riding a week later into Hertford on business, he met the Governor of the County Gaol, who informed him: "The Haggerty woman is dying. I doubt if she will ever come up for trial."

"What makes you think that?" Parkinson asked him.

"Age is going to cheat the gallows, that's all," the Governor answered. "We can't force her to eat enough to keep body and soul together. Senile decay is claiming its victim. She is getting more feeble every day."

Two days later the Governor called at Moatlands Park. "It's all over," he told the Squire. "The warder found her dead this morning. Rigor mortis had set in before the doctor arrived. He doesn't think it necessary to hold a post-mortem, but of course if you wish it . . ."

"If she's dead, she's dead," Parkinson replied. "Get her well under ground as soon as you can."

"It will be done this evening at dusk," the Governor said.

There were no mourners as the rough coffin was interred in the little cemetery outside the prison walls. The grave was shallow, for the Governor had seen no force in part of the magistrate's instructions. The whole ceremony lasted less than half an hour. The postern gate had barely closed for the grave-diggers to replace their tools in the

prison mortuary when Michello and three other gypsies appeared on the scene.

With feverish haste they worked on the freshly filled grave. They disinterred the coffin, filled the grave in again, and disappeared, bearing the coffin with them.

Back at the hovel off the Enfield-Cheshunt highway the other gypsies retired, leaving Michello with his supposedly dead mother. Michello himself hardly expected the experiment to be successful, although Haggerty had thrown herself into a cataleptic trance once before to convince him. He was less sure of success when he had the lid of the coffin off, for the condition of suspended animation which had deceived the prison doctor also deceived him. But he followed his mother's instructions to the letter. He administered to her the nourishment she had prescribed, and presently her eyes opened. Another hour, and she was able to accompany him to a hiding place already devised, after which Michello returned to burn in a safe spot the empty coffin.

CHAPTER XII

THE MELTING ICON AND THE FIRST FEATHER

DURING the evening of Mrs. Parkinson's travail her husband paced up and down the library in feverish anxiety. So much depended upon that new life which she should usher into the world. From the time when Dr. Matthews had been sent for in the early morning, the Squire's mind had been tortured with harassing questions. Where had Haggerty lied, and where had she spoken the truth? That was the question that gnawed at his brain more than any other. Mildred's protestations of innocence had no more than half convinced him. He found himself staking all on Haggerty's first prediction, long before there was any prospect of a child at all, that he would never have a son. If a daughter were born, then she would be his; if a son . . .

He stopped his pacing as Dr. Matthews entered the library. Knowing that all of the Squire's hopes had been centered on a son, the doctor's face may have expressed a sentiment he was far from feeling. It called from Parkinson the remark: "I am not in a mood for sympathy. What is it?"

"I came, not to sympathize, but to congratulate you on the birth of a lovely daughter," the doctor replied. Then,

with more interest in his patient's progress than in the Squire's prejudices, he added: "Sir, you must not let your disappointment . . ."

"Disappointment!" the Squire roared. "Who said I was disappointed?"

Dr. Matthews was confused. After what Parkinson had said previously, he found it difficult to reconcile himself to such an abrupt change of demeanor. He had been worried about the Squire's mental attitude, and just now he appeared far from normal. He thought it better to humor him.

"You will be proud of her, sir," he said. "Mrs. Parkinson will make a complete recovery, and . . . there is no reason why a subsequent child . . ."

Parkinson laughed.

It was strange how often now that impulse to laugh came to him. In his bitterest moments he could laugh where laughter would not come before. But it was laughter that was not pleasant to hear. The doctor recoiled from it.

"You expect another one?" The query was as contemptuous as the laughter.

"Not now, of course," Dr. Matthews hastened to answer.

"Nor ever," Parkinson hurled at him. "Can't you get it into your brain that Haggerty has proved that she can damn everything pertaining to this house?"

"You are too despondent," Matthews reasoned with him. "You are wrong to brood upon what Haggerty said. Hers was nothing more than a petty form of revenge. As for reading the stars, you shouldn't place any confidence in

that. She made a correct guess, that's all, gambling on an even chance. There's no reason in the world why you should not have other children. I can understand how you have wished for a son, and why. Mrs. Parkinson, knowing that, is just as disappointed as you. You must go to see her. She is expecting you. By your manner in accepting this child you may make or mar your whole future happiness."

That was all he said to him, but it was enough to make Parkinson think more rationally. Momentary reaction made him cling to the suggestion like a last straw. Whatever else Haggerty had done, she had made his mind susceptible to suggestion.

Crawford, Sir Philip, and now Matthews—all had either openly or covertly criticized his attitude. Conscience hammered in to him that they could not all be wrong. Mildred had never caused emotional affection in him. He did not believe that possible. Haggerty might have deliberately played upon that fact.

Had he not deliberately trampled underfoot one great fundamental law of Nature, one of the greatest factors of the Universe . . . love! Perhaps that was the curse that was haunting him. Could he change that, and so rid himself of the incubus to which Haggerty had added her greater weight?

When the nurse admitted them to Mrs. Parkinson's room, she and the doctor retired as far as possible out of hearing. Mildred's eyes were wistful as he approached the

bed. Her hand was lying on the coverlet. He took it in his, and felt the tremor of joy that passed through her at this slight sign of understanding. He had to stoop to hear her speak.

"I'm so sorry, Richard," she said, her eyes brimming with tears, her fingers trembling in his.

"Don't worry about it," he struggled to reply. "You know we were expecting it to happen like this." Swallowing harder, he continued. "It is a disappointment, but not altogether. I think you understand why, Mildred. I am glad you are safely through. Matthews is sure you will make a perfect recovery."

"I am not thinking of my own recovery," Mildred said. "If I thought I could ever make up for it with a son . . ."

"Matthews says you will."

"Does he?" There was gladness in her voice. "And . . . you will try to forget your disappointment by loving our baby girl? She is ours, you know."

Her eyes were seeking to read his soul as she said this, an ardent longing in them . . . an appeal for the additional right to his love her motherhood had given her.

"Yes, I know," he replied. Under her tender gaze the words were like a sob in his throat. Unseen hands were forcing his head down. He bent suddenly and pressed his lips to hers, while she, in the effulgence of her joy, closed her arms about him, and tried feebly to press him to her breast. She was experiencing the first real peace she had known for uncountable days.

"You are generous to forgive me, Richard," she said—just a mere breath—as his lips disengaged themselves from hers.

He had yet to steel himself for the ordeal of looking upon the child who had restored his confidence but destroyed his hopes. The nurse approached with the living bundle in her arms. What she held was a blur to his vision, and it was a terrible moment for him to look at the face of his infant daughter. But he struggled hard to keep alive the little spark of natural impulse Mildred's kiss had quickened. He managed to articulate something which had the semblance of being appropriate, and escaped from the room as his wife made space for the baby to nestle on her bosom.

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A week later his rekindled hopes were shattered. Haggerty delivered the blow for the accomplishment of which she had introduced Miranda into the Manor.

Since the departure of the guests, Moatlands Park had settled back upon its customary routine. The servants retired punctually at ten o'clock, with the exception of Peters, who was the Squire's personal attendant, the majordomo, and one of the footmen. Peters attended his master to assist him in disrobing. His room adjoined the Squire's. The others followed them upstairs, the footman extinguishing the lights under the supervision of the majordomo.

This night, Peters put out the library light when the Squire left the room at ten-thirty. Almost at the same time Miranda stole noiselessly into Mrs. Parkinson's room. Mrs. Parkinson was sleeping soundly, assisted by drops of an

essence Miranda had administered. The nurse also was sleeping soundly from the same cause. Miranda removed that evidence, and then cautiously opened the door leading to the corridor outside.

In the distance she heard the two servants making their final adjustments, then descending by the servants' stairway to their own quarters. The corridor was dark, and she crept silently to the wing where the Squire's rooms were. Listening, she could hear the Squire and Peters talking, and she waited until their final good-night. Then she went downstairs, and opened the door into the fernery. Michello and Mother Haggerty entered.

"I have done everything you told me," Miranda said. "The nurse and the mother are both fast asleep."

"And the rest of the house?" Haggerty queried.

"Went to bed half an hour or more ago."

"Some day you shall marry Michello, and be queen of the gypsies," Haggerty promised again.

Miranda turned to Michello. "You want to marry me? You do love me?"

"Of course," Michello answered curtly. "Why do you ask?"

"The lady has been very good to me. I love you, Michello; but, if you didn't love me, I should want to stay here. I wouldn't let you harm her."

Michello seized her wrist savagely, crushed her against himself and kissed her. "Does that satisfy you?" he asked.

Miranda nodded, and held up her lips again. She had not seen the flash of understanding that passed between him and his mother.

Mother Haggerty was wearing felt shoes. Michello pulled a pair of coarse socks over his heavier shoes, and Miranda led the way upstairs.

Mrs. Parkinson was sleeping quietly, and did not awaken as they uncovered her and turned her on her side. "Watch just outside the door!" Mother Haggerty commanded Miranda. To Michello: "The needle!"

Michello took a needle from a glass tube, but he hesitated before he handed it to his mother. "You are sure this won't be discovered?" he asked doubtfully. "You bungled over the other."

"I didn't bungle," Haggerty replied. "It was part of my plan. This is different. Besides, what does it matter? I am supposed to be dead."

"Knowing that, they would look for someone else, starting with Miranda," Michello grumbled.

"They won't find anything," his mother said. "I made no mistake before. I knew I must go through the grave to be able to terrify Richard Parkinson and his hated brood. Did you not learn all about the expert they called in? He will be called again, and he won't look for anything. He believes in magic."


"And Miranda?"

"I will see that she remembers nothing."

Michello demurred no further. From his capacious pockets he produced three objects, a small spirit lamp, a

plate of sheet metal on four legs, and a waxen image fashioned in the shape of a woman. He lit the lamp, and adjusted it under the plate. When that was hot enough, he withdrew the lamp and extinguished it. His mother meanwhile had pulled aside the obstetric bandage that swathed Mrs. Parkinson, and pushed the point of the needle into the base of her spine. Michello joined Miranda, leaving Haggerty to complete the hideous rite unaided.

The hag placed the icon upright on the hot plate. It began to melt immediately, though slowly. Then she awakened the sleeping woman, in whose lower limbs the paralyzing element was already beginning to take effect.



Mildred opened her eyes to see Haggerty bending over her. With her back to the window, the witch's form was shadowy. Indeed, Mildred's impression was that she had a ghostly visitant, the wraith of the woman her husband had hounded to death. Nothing about her appeared physical, except the fierce light blazing from her black eyes.

The unfortunate woman started to scream, but Haggerty's claw-like hand was instantly in front of her face.

"You cannot make a sound!"

The suggestion was terse, restraining . . . hypnotic in its virility. Her victim's tongue clove to her mouth as she struggled ineffectually to cry out. Haggerty continued, while her fingers continued their mesmeric motions: "I have come back from the grave to fulfill my vengeance. Your husband will never have a son. In five minutes you will be dead!"

She pointed to the melting icon, upon which the full light of the moon was streaming through the parted casement curtains. "As that image is melting, so will you die!"

Mildred turned her terrified eyes towards the icon, and nodded unvolitionally as the hideous voice continued: "You understand; you will die . . . upwards!"

The wraith withdrew, seeming to disintegrate as it commingled with the shadows in the depth of the room.

The image was still upright on the sheet of metal, but sinking, and consciousness came to Mildred that the creature's words were true. There was a peculiar numbness creeping upwards over her own body at the same rate as the image was melting. She felt her knees; they were as cold as ice. Nor could she take her hands away again.

The hands of the icon were already melting!

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The metal plate was still warm as Michello, following instructions from his mother, slid what was left of the icon on to the dressing table, posing it in an upright position. Seeing the result of the hellish experiment, Miranda was frightened. It occurred to her that she might be suspected. Of what use then for Michello to speak of his promise to marry her!

"Your work here is not finished yet," Haggerty answered her trembling question. "You must remain."

"But . . . they will question me!"

"You will only remember what I want you to. Look at me!"

Miranda hesitated to comply with the command. Thoroughly alarmed, she remembered what always happened to her before when Haggerty commanded her to do that.

"Where do you sleep?" Michello asked her, substantiating her fears.

"In there." She indicated another door leading from her dead mistress's room. "It's where the other died."

"You won't die," Haggerty said sharply. "Look at me!"

Unable to resist, Miranda complied.

"You will sleep! When they question you, you will answer words I shall give you. When you wake, you will remember nothing until it is my will you shall remember. Sleep!"

Miranda swayed, and Michello caught her. "Hurry!" his mother instructed him. "We must undress her together."

"Leave me with her," she said when that was done. "You attend to the Parkinson spawn!"

"She'll betray us if she ever remembers," Michello was not quite at ease.

"If she ever remembers!" his mother echoed tersely. "I know what I am doing."

Before they left Haggerty placed an object on the pillows beside the dead woman. It was a pinion feather of a raven!

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT MIRANDA REVEALED

RICHARD PARKINSON awoke to the fact that someone was tapping at his door. He touched the bell that would summon Peters, afterwards donning a dressing gown and slippers. The valet came in immediately, similarly attired.

"See who is at the door," his master said.

Peters opened the door, and admitted Nurse Maley. Parkinson took a stride towards her as she collapsed into a chair.

"Mrs. Parkinson . . ." she gasped.

"Yes, yes. What is the matter?" the Squire stammered.

"Dead!" the nurse sobbed.

"Dead?" he echoed vaguely. "How is that?"

"I don't know," the nurse answered. "I awoke a few minutes ago. Hearing the baby cry, I went in to see what was the matter. I found Mrs. Parkinson . . . dead. She must have been dead some time."

"How long since you were in there before?"

"Not since ten-thirty last night. I never remember sleeping so soundly before. Not that I thought that mattered, sir, because she was perfectly all right when I left her."

Attired as he was, Parkinson hurried along the corridor to his wife's suite. There was no mistaking the pallor that overspread Mildred's face. Her eyes were wide open . . . staring . . . terrified!

"I tried to close her eyes," Nurse Maley told him, "but the muscles were already rigid."

"Didn't you hear her call?"

"I don't think she did call. I should have heard her. If not, the maid would. She was staring at this wax on the dressing-table. It wasn't here before."

Parkinson was not listening. He had picked up the feather. "How did this get here?" he demanded.

"I don't know," the nurse answered. "It's all so bewildering. It must have come in through the window. Listen to that, sir!"

But Parkinson had already heard. In the trees outside a raven was croaking with a sound like fiendish laughter. His blood ran cold as he recalled seeing such a bird in Haggerty's hovel. Haggerty was dead, but she had said she would work her vengeance on him from the grave. This feather, and the evil bird outside to which it evidently belonged. Could it be possible that Haggerty and the raven . . . !"

"Good God!" he exclaimed, clutching the table for support. "Take the baby to another part of the house. I must get Crawford and Matthews."

He staggered to the library to telephone, then returned alone to gaze once more on the features of her who had been his wife, and whose death shattered for ever the last remaining hope of the Parkinsons. His wife . . . and Philip's

love! The croaking outside had ceased, but the thought which had struck him remained. Dead or reincarnated, this was Haggerty's work. Dead, Crawford was sure she could exert nothing more than an influence which could be resisted. Could there be such a thing as transmigration of souls? As he fled from the room he met Nurse Maley, who was returning to tell him there was a scratch on the baby's wrist, such as might have been made by the claw of a bird!


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Dr. Matthews was the first to come. By that time Parkinson had allowed Peters to dress him. The doctor was almost as perturbed as the Squire. He had visited his patient that afternoon, finding her in perfect health and spirits—that is, so far as progress from her recent confinement permitted. There was no reason in the world to conclude that Mrs. Parkinson's death was natural. It was the second time in the course of a few weeks that he had been called upon to subscribe to a death in the Manor concerning the cause of which he knew nothing. His orthodoxy was rudely shaken when the Squire told of his own suspicions.

"Impossible!" he ejaculated nevertheless. "Haggerty killed Marie. That was proved by the poison discovered by Sir Victor Norton. But Haggerty is dead, and . . ."

"I'll have you and Crawford both convinced yet that death places no obstacle in the way of a creature like her," Parkinson exploded. "I've sent for Crawford. We'll wait here until he comes, for I don't think you can tell me any more than I already know . . . that my wife is dead."

"If you are certain of that, there is nothing I can do," Dr. Matthews acquiesced, feeling relieved. He added: "Believe me, sir, I realize that you have suffered a terrible loss."



Loss! The doctor's words brought this idea to Parkinson's mind for the first time. Loss! Yes, indeed, perhaps that was what was causing the aching he could feel at his heart, above the throbbing anger that was setting his blood on fire, and laying him open to a seizure of apoplexy. Until then, his anger and impatience had been caused by the renewed evidence of Haggerty's hand against him. He had been suffering under a sense of personal injury rather than under a sense of loss. The tiny spark of love which had tried to kindle itself into a flame had been too embryonic in development to arouse a sympathy for his wife which could outweigh that sense of personal injury to himself. He had left it too late for it to mature, and perhaps it was that which was tugging at his heart-strings. Perhaps too, it was that which made him feel a sudden respect for his wife now such as he had never experienced while she was living, and made him feel ashamed that Dr. Matthews was aware of his previous attitude. Whatever the cause, he turned to the doctor and held out his hand, saying: "I had no intention of disparaging your ability, sir. Were Mildred's death due to ordinary means, I should have left her entirely in your hands. As it is, I feel justified in my apparent discourtesy in asking Crawford to come before consulting you . . . in asking you to await his arrival. If you wish, however, you are perfectly at liberty to make your own examination."

"I can quite understand how you feel about it," Dr. Matthews repeated sympathetically. "The thought of discourtesy had not occurred to me. And I think it would be better for everything to be left undisturbed until Crawford comes. If you wish, I will join the nurse, and see that baby Evelyn is all right."

That recalled the fact to Parkinson's mind that had driven him from the room.

"Yes, go to look at her," he said excitedly. "There is a scratch on her wrist . . . made by a bird's claw!"

"A bird's claw?" the doctor expressed his stupefaction.

"That's what I said. And there was a feather . . . a raven's feather . . . on the pillow beside Mildred. God! It's horrible to think of that creature coming back from hell!"

"Coming back from . . ." Dr. Matthews was amazed.

"You don't believe in transmigration?" Parkinson asked him sharply. Before giving him time to answer, the Squire went on: "I half believed it before. That fiend of hell has come back to prove it."

"My dear sir, you are distraught," Dr. Matthews tried to reason with him. "Perhaps a brandy and soda . . . ?"

"Do I look insane?" Parkinson questioned his astounded auditor.

"No . . . but . . ." the other stammered.

"But I'm going to be, eh?" Parkinson thought he was finishing for him. "The way I feel now, there's no doubt about it. Besides, it's what she said."

"As a member of the church . . ." the doctor began again, though he feared suddenly that Parkinson's mind was becoming unhinged.

"It will take more than the church to exorcise her evil spirit out of that confounded bird!" the Squire flung at him.

"My dear sir," Mathews made another attempt. But Parkinson would not listen to him. "Go and look at that scratch," he said. "If you can suggest what else made it . . ."

Dr. Matthews went, glad to leave him. He had not returned when Crawford arrived.

"If you don't mind, I should like to get my own impressions first," Crawford suggested as Parkinson met him in the hall. "I hope nothing has been disturbed."

The Squire told him, "Nothing," and led the way up the stairs.

Crawford went straight to the bed, and commenced his examination. He gave one glance at Mildred's face, and then tore the coverings away from her body with an impatient gesture. Then he spoke to Dr. Matthews, who had joined them, and his words bore the weight of an angry indictment against the latter's professional care.

"This is a more tangible case, Dr. Matthews," he said. "Had you made even a superficial examination you would not have needed to send for me;"

"I sent for you; I kept him from making an examination," Parkinson said, at the same time as Matthews stammered: "Why? What do you mean?"

"You should have been expecting this for days," Crawford retorted scathingly. "Come and see for yourself!"

Bewildered, Dr. Matthews went over to him, and studied the postmortem symptoms Crawford indicated. He could hardly believe his eyes.

"Landry's paralysis!" he ejaculated.

"Exactly," Crawford said.

"Impossible!"

"What's this?" Parkinson asked.

"Acute ascending paralysis," Crawford explained, "commencing with the lower extremities, and passing upwards over the body until the medulla is reached, when final death occurs. Your wife, Mr. Parkinson, has been dying for days. How long is it since the baby was born?"

"A week," Parkinson answered, mystified.

"That's it, then. A week is the normal time for its development."

"But I tell you it's impossible!" Dr. Matthews exclaimed again. "The birth was perfect. I am absolutely certain there was no lesion of the spinal cord."

"What has all this got to do with Haggerty?" Parkinson asked Crawford, as Matthews went to fetch Nurse Maley to corroborate his statements.

"I warned you about letting Haggerty become an obsession," Crawford answered frigidly. He was out of temper with everyone, thinking his night's sleep had been disturbed for nothing. "This, my dear sir, is a perfectly natural case of creeping paralysis. I should advise you . . ."

Parkinson's eye fell on the feather. The nurse had removed it from the pillow. The entrance of the nurse interrupted what he would say. She corroborated Dr. Matthews's statements in detail. She had given Mrs. Parkinson a blanket bath that evening, and circulation had been perfectly normal. It was Crawford's turn to be perplexed. Almost mechanically he took the feather Parkinson was holding out to him.

"What's this?" he asked.

Parkinson explained where it was found, and started to mention the scratch on the baby's wrist. But Crawford had turned to the nurse. "You don't know how it came there?" he asked her.

Her reply was negative.

"Who else has had access to this room besides you?" he enquired further. "Not that I think it has any bearing on the case," he added, "but . . ."

He stopped short. The nurse was explaining: "There is only the maid, Lois. She sleeps in that room there," . . . indicating the door through which Michello had carried Miranda. "I went to awaken her just now . . . a few minutes ago. There must be something the matter with her, too. I couldn't rouse her. Once I saw a woman in a trance . . ."

Crawford was already half-way to the door of the room in which Miranda was sleeping under the influence of Haggerty. His demeanor had changed completely during the nurse's recital. For the first time it occurred to him that there might really be some mystery behind Mrs. Parkinson's apparently natural death, and that the unconscious maid

WHAT MIRANDA REVEALED 133

might hold the key to that mystery. And a glance at the sleeping girl confirmed his surmises, and the nurse's statements.

"Who is she?" he turned to the Squire.

"Why . . Mrs. Parkinson's maid," Parkinson answered, vaguely wondering what new thing was coming to light.

"I mean . . where did she come from?"

"I can't tell you that. My wife engaged her to take the place of the maid Haggerty killed. Beyond that I know nothing about her. I had nothing to do with the engagement of women domestics. That was entirely my wife's province. I'll get the housekeeper. She . . ."

"Never mind that now," Crawford interrupted him. "I begin to believe with you that Haggerty is behind this. This is something of what I meant when I spoke of telepathic influence from beyond the grave . . spirit influence. This girl . . ."

"Yes, yes," Parkinson urged him excitedly.

"Is sleeping under the influence of some powerful form of hypnosis," Crawford continued. "If Haggerty has been instrumental in any way, this girl must at some time have been used by her as a medium in psychic experiments."

"You mean . . she may have been in league with Haggerty . . that Haggerty planted her here?"

"That is the conclusion most persistent with me," Crawford answered.

"And used her to kill my wife?"

"So far, as I have said, I find no indications of anything physical to cause death."

"Then what has the girl got to do with it?"

"I shall try to discover that. In her present condition, if she has been used as a spiritualistic medium in any way, I may be able to elicit it from her. It will help me if you remain quiet. No matter what disclosures may come from her, do not make any interruptions. It will be difficult to get her even partially under my control."

He walked over to Miranda as he spoke, and for five minutes studiously massaged her eyes and brow, concentrating on her the full force of his own hypnotic power. At the end of that time he started to question her, his questions being more in the nature of positive assertions. When response came from Miranda, her voice spoke faintly, as if the words emanated from away beyond, in the ethereal distance.

"Who are you?"

Twice he asked the question without getting an answer. He repeated it the third time, and there was visible evidence of a struggle as the girl said: "I . . don't remember."

"Where are you now?"

"I am a spirit, wandering in space," the response came more distinctly.

"You will come back to earth to answer my questions!"

"I cannot. Spirit hands hold me. They will not release me."

"Whose hands are they?"

"I don't know . . her name."

"You have heard it?"

"Perhaps. I don't remember."

"You have heard of Haggerty?"

"Who is Haggerty?"

"A gypsy . . a very old woman."

"Yes, a gypsy . . a very old woman."

"You have seen her before?"

"Once . . in the flesh. In the spirit . . many times."

"Where did you see her in the flesh?"

"A long way from here. She put me to sleep."

"How did she put you to sleep?"

"Her eyes controlled my will."

"She did it more than once?"

"Perhaps. I don't remember."

"I shall compel you to remember!"

"You cannot. Her spirit is around me now . . holding me."

"In this room?"

"I am not in a room. I am wandering."

"You were in a room when she came to you?"

"Yes. I was in a room."

"Where?"

"In a large house. I forget the name."

"You are still in that room!" Crawford persisted. "The reply was hesitating, as if she were fighting against a conviction. 'I *was* in a room. Now, I am in the air . . floating. I have lost my body.'"

"You will find it again."

"No . . . never find it again."

"She came to you in the room? "

"Her spirit came."

"How do you know it was her *spirit*?"

"Only the eyes came."

"You recognized her eyes?"

"Yes . . . black eyes. Piercing, black eyes."

"Did the eyes put you to sleep?"

"Yes, but my body stayed with me . . . until she took it away. When she took my body from me, she left me . . . wandering."

"What happened before she did that?"

"I did what she told me to."

"What was that?" Crawford asked, with suppressed eagerness. The others crowded closer to listen.

"There was a little image in a drawer in another room. I found it, and placed it on the dressing-table. There was a baby, and a bird . . . a large bird, with her eyes . . . black, piercing eyes!"

Parkinson made an exclamation, and she relaxed with a sigh.

"A raven's feather . . . the scratch of a raven's claw . . . and now the raven's eyes!" Parkinson said savagely. "Always that confounded bird!"

"What were you saying about a scratch?" Crawford asked.

"On the baby's wrist."

For a moment Crawford was confused. "You are sure you are not mistaken?"

"That is what it looks like. The bird at least must have been in the room."

WHAT MIRANDA REVEALED 137

"Could it have got in?" Crawford asked.

"Yes. The window was open," Parkinson answered. He added: "Whatever got in, it was more than a bird. No raven that was a mere raven could have done that."

"Then what are you thinking?"

"There is a closer connection between Haggerty and the raven than you imagine, Crawford. Good God! Living, the raven was her familiar; dead, her evil spirit has embodied itself in the bird! We were fools to let it escape when we arrested her."

"I don't remember seeing it there then," Crawford said. He added: "Candidly, I don't believe in transmigration of souls. This girl has explained how she was principally used as a tool . . . I believe by spirit influence."

"But . . . the feather . . . the scratch?" Parkinson insisted.

"There may be other things she hasn't told us. I'll try again presently. I must examine the image she speaks of."

He went into the other room, and stared for a moment at what remained of the icon. Even yet there was a facial resemblance to Mrs. Parkinson in the figure. It bore out the truth of the strange statements elicited from Miranda. He turned to Dr. Matthews. "I owe you an apology, sir," he said. "I hope you will accept it."

"Certainly," Matthews replied, "though I can't see yet where you were wrong."

"This wax . . . what is it?" Parkinson demanded impatiently.

"It represents one of the most obscene forms of witchcraft ever devised," Crawford answered. "It is the remains of a waxen icon, made, as you see, to resemble your wife."

"And you don't believe in Haggerty's reincarnation?"

"This may have been in her possession from the time she visited Haggerty," Crawford said, "or brought to her by Haggerty's other tool, the girl she killed. The girl in there has explained what she had to do with it."

"Heavens!" Parkinson ejaculated. "I am still in the dark."

"If you think you can bear to listen, I will explain it to you," Crawford told him.

"For God's sake, yes . . . tell me!"

"Such occult experiments are known to psychic research," Crawford returned. "An icon is made as nearly as possible in the image of the intended victim. Possibly it was the strange resemblance that led your wife to keep it. Through the image the charm is worked by a skilled exponent in witchcraft. Sometimes the neck of the image is broken, sometimes it is pierced through where the heart would be with a skewer; sometimes it is burnt, sometimes strangled. Whatever the process, the victim dies mysteriously in the same way. This melting process . . . it is new to me. Neither have I heard of an occasion before where it was combined with a spiritualistic influence."

"I see the result, but it is unbelievable!" Dr. Matthews half expostulated.

"You have heard of the 'death prayer' of the Kanaka priest?" Crawford questioned him.

"Yes, but . . . I thought it was the imagination of the fiction writer," Matthews stammered.

"It is practised upon the superstitious Hawaiian aborigines to this day," Crawford replied. "The potent element there is fear. But it works . . . works hellishly! It was mainly fear that caused your wife's death, Mr. Parkinson. You can see it registered on her features. The poor woman knew what was happening . . . knew there was no escape!"

"But the raven?" Parkinson strangled apoplectically. "It had Haggerty's eyes. The girl said so. Will you believe now . . . ?"

"I believe in influence, on things animate and inanimate . . . even as the Christ cursed the fig tree, and it died," Crawford answered enigmatically. "The connection between the dead Haggerty and her familiar has yet to be proved to be believed," he added, and expounded more lucidly: "The secrets of the method revealed by the girl in there . . . the whole sequence of the scheme . . . is the greatest evidence against what you believe is transmigration. Haggerty living, in no matter what form, would hardly have permitted so much of her methods to be revealed. The actual secret of Marie's death died with her."

"Surely, with your method of extracting information . . ." Dr. Matthews began.

"I gathered more from the girl's disclosures than you did," Crawford replied quietly. "Therein lies the greatest mystery to be solved. She was speaking neither of her own volition, nor under compulsion from me. The answers she

gave were regulated by the same influence as that under which she placed the icon. If she recovers her faculties . . . ”

“You don’t think she’ll sleep like that for ever?” Dr. Matthews protested.

“No. She will awaken all right . . . in time. Whether with, or without reason and memory, is a different question. If you have no objection, sir, I’ll try her again.”

Parkinson signified his approval, and accompanied Crawford into the maid’s bedroom. They obtained no result. Crawford attempted every psychic expedient he knew, but could not get another word from her. And, when he finally succeeded in awakening her from her trance, she remembered nothing of what she had previously said. To all appearances normal, her mind was absolutely blank.

“You would still persuade me that that could be achieved by spirit influence?” Parkinson questioned scornfully when they left her again.

“I would rather do that than attempt to limit the powers of hell,” Crawford said.

“You expect to convince a court of law that she acted under supernatural compulsion?”

“There will be no court of law in this,” Crawford answered quietly. “I am convinced that what she did was done, *prima facie*, in innocence. Besides, even the wrack could not enforce the return of a stolen memory. She is sane, that’s one blessing. Memory may come back later, though it is doubtful.”

WHAT MIRANDA REVEALED 141

"Then what is to be done with her?" Parkinson demanded.

"I'll take her with me, and have her kept under expert observation," Crawford answered. "If any developments occur I'll let you know immediately."



CHAPTER XIV

AN ORCHID AND A WAGER

THE day after Mrs. Parkinson's funeral, the Squire sent for Wilson. Crawford had not shattered his belief in the connection between Haggerty and the raven. Death had disposed of Haggerty in one sense, but not in another. His thoughts had dwelt unceasingly upon the possibility of redisposing of her by killing the raven. And there was but one way he felt he could be sure of accomplishing that.

"Wilson," he said, "every raven within the limits of my jurisdiction has got to be shot. You and I have both suffered at Haggerty's hands, and that is the only way to get even with her."

"But Haggerty is dead, sir!" Wilson hazarded.

Parkinson took the raven's feather from his desk. "This is a raven's feather, Wilson," he said.

"Yes, sir," Wilson stammered. He, in common with the other servants of the establishment, knew where it was found. "A wing feather, sir."

"Exactly. You have also heard, no doubt, that Haggerty kept a raven as a sort of domestic pet. This feather belonged to it. The prison authorities buried Haggerty. It

is the common belief that she is dead, but *she isn't dead*, while that accursed raven of hers is still living. You don't believe in the supernatural, do you?"

"Not exactly, sir," Wilson answered.

"Well, I do."

Wilson did not know what to say. He thought the Squire's bereavement must have turned his brain, though he spoke logically enough. Parkinson continued: "I am glad you don't believe in the supernatural, Wilson, because you won't mind going after that raven."

"Me, sir?"

"Yes; I'm placing you in charge of the shooting, so far as the estate and the Hickmanworth Copse are concerned. You can take as many men as you like."

Wilson mentioned the orchids. Since Marie's death, he had had them entirely in his charge. He had nursed them with the greatest care, not so much now for the Claverton Prize, but because they helped him to bury his thoughts.

"The orchids can go to the devil, if I can't look after them myself," Parkinson said abruptly.

"In my spare time . . ." Wilson suggested.

"You'll have no spare time until all those damned birds are killed. I want you to get that bird of Haggerty's. If you can bring me proof that you have got it, I'll give you a hundred guineas."

"When do I start, sir?"

"Immediately. Take the men you want, and get the guns from the armoury. You are to think of nothing else until I give you permission."

Twenty minutes later, for the first time in many years, the sound of guns was heard disturbing the solitude of Moatlands Park. Again and again the sounds came with gratifying precision to the Squire's ears. The first day's bag amounted to over a hundred birds. Early the following morning the guns were out again, and a few days later there was not a raven to be found within a radius of several miles of the Manor. Neighbouring farmers had added their efforts as soon as it became known that the Squire wished them destroyed. Crows and other birds resembling ravens fell indiscriminately in the general slaughter. And Wilson was tireless in his efforts, not so much for the promised reward of a hundred guineas. He had never before given the subject of superstition a thought. Now he was beginning to be impressed by what the Squire had said, and wanted the job finished. Besides, the orchids might be suffering from his master's neglect.

In that he need not have worried. Crawford had called at the Manor on the day after the raven shooting commenced, with the report that nothing further had been elicited from Miranda. Her memory was still a blank. Suggestion, under repeated hypnosis, had failed to restore even a vestige of it. He commended the destruction of the ravens as supplying a change of occupation. He also advised Parkinson to devote as much time as he could to the orchids for the same purpose, and the Squire followed that counsel.

He received other encouragement, too, which determined him to make a great effort to win the coveted Claverton Prize.

AN ORCHID AND A WAGER 145

Lord Sherbrooke had written him a warm-hearted letter of sympathy, and expressed the hope that his sad bereavement would not affect their friendly rivalry. For ten years in succession Lord Sherbrooke's gardens had carried off the Claverton Prize. In eight of these Parkinson's exhibits had failed in one or two points, though his specimens were perfect.

The new plants were sturdy, showing great promise. Soon they would be ready for the delicate operation of grafting, and in that he would need Wilson's assistance. He was almost cheerful when he sent for him.

"You may put your gun away now," he said to the gardener. "You have made a satisfactory job of that. Here is the check for the one hundred guineas I promised you."

Wilson demurred about taking it at first. He had no proof that he had got the bird for which the reward had been promised. The Squire insisted.

"If we find you have not, I'll send you after it again," he told him.

After that matters ran on normally for a time. Rid of the noisy ravens, Moatlands Park was certainly overshadowed by a penetrating stillness, and, probably by some strange psychological effect, that silence was more perceptible than the cries of the ravens had been. Sometimes still Parkinson fancied an invisible spirit of unrest resided in the silent treetops. Such fancies, however, bothered him less and less. Haggerty's raven had never been seen since the slaughter. If it had not been killed, it had at least taken fright, and might never return. Gradually the dogged

self-domination of the Parkinsons reasserted itself in him, and there were very rare occasions when he allowed himself to become anew the prey of moody foreboding. Besides, the big exhibition was due to take place in the autumn, and the Squire found it comparatively easy now to take full advantage of Crawford's counsel.

Nothing of any particular importance occurred as the weeks lengthened into months, until the opening day of the Exhibition arrived. This year it was being held in the picturesque Dome and Pavilion at Brighton—a one-time royal seat. The Prince of Wales opened the Exhibition. Following closely upon the opening of the London season, it was always a brilliant social event, and this year was no exception. Were it not that he was eager to see his own productions outclass those of Lord Sherbrooke, this fact would have kept Parkinson away. He had not attended a social function of any description since the death of his wife. He escaped as soon as he could from the various formalities he could not ignore . . . from listening to condolences from acquaintances and rivals . . . and concentrated his attention on the orchid exhibits. There he found much to afford him satisfaction.

Of the more than two thousand choice orchids displayed, some fifty alone were of a class to compete for the Society Medal and the Claverton Prize. Out of these fifty his and Lord Sherbrooke's easily eclipsed the others, and the majority of the experts there favored those he had produced. The judges had not yet promulgated their decision.

Although the principal competitions are always limited

AN ORCHID AND A WAGER 147

to growers of the British Isles, the Exhibition attracts interested spectators from all parts of the globe. As usual, there were many foreigners of affluence and nobility. Among these, we must take particular notice of one.

This gentleman was a Hindoo who moved in an ostentatious display of wealth. His bearing—his entourage—would have proclaimed his opulence even had he tried to hide it. He was registered at the Hotel Metropole as Tumahl Shadakhari, with no indication of rank or caste, but it was believed by many that he was a powerful Hindoo potentate traveling incognito. The Prince of Wales had been observed talking to him in a confidential manner. He had then no need of further credentials.

Tumahl Shadakhari claimed to be an orchid enthusiast. That he was so was evident from the fluent manner in which he could discourse upon the few Asiatic specimens that were exhibited. He expressed keen disappointment that there were none of them in the running for the principal awards; for, as a matter of fact, the majority of the orchids—indeed, all of the hybrids—were of Brazilian origin.

"Are the English growers afraid to attempt Asiatic orchids? he finally challenged, when his criticisms concerning the choice of growths had themselves been criticized.

Some of the more famous growers, including Parkinson and Lord Sherbrooke, resented the suspicion of sarcasm which they thought they detected underlying the question. They could understand his native prejudice, but felt that they were not called upon to justify their own preference

for Brazilians.° The Claverton Prize was restricted to Brazilian orchids.

"These are really beautiful specimens," Shadakhari went on, with an inclusive sweep of his hand. His English was fluent and perfect. "A tribute to wonderful skill, I should say. But the most beautiful of them would pale into insignificance if displayed side by side with some from my own country . . . from the swamps of the Hoogli."

"These, sir, are all hybrids," Lord Sherbrooke replied. "They require real cultivation. Monogenous plants . . ."

"I have paid a tribute to your skill, gentlemen all," Shadakhari returned blandly. "I did not enter into this argument because I thought there was any question of that, but because I am cognizant of species—especially of the *Coelogyninae* found in the Hoogli Delta—which defy all efforts at cultivation. It is because I am satisfied with this remarkable display of your skill that I suggest you give Asiatics some of your attention."

"Then you think it can't be done?" Lord Sherbrooke asked.

Shadakhari evaded a direct answer.

"It would prove your skill greater than that of experts who have had the opportunity to study the *Coelogynina* in its native element," he smiled.

"I, for one, have never been to Brazil; yet I think I understand Brazilian orchids better than many who have only to travel a few hundred miles into the jungle to see them growing native," Lord Sherbrooke returned, somewhat arrogantly. There was still too great an undercurrent of

criticism beneath Shadakhari's otherwise polite remarks. "More than that, sir, I am willing to wager the value of the Claverton Prize that there is no orchid in the Hoogli swamps . . . or in the swamps of the Inferno, if there are any . . . that English growers can not only cultivate, but propagate."

"I would wager the same with pleasure, and undertake to grow them myself," Parkinson said.

Several others said the same.

Shadakhari gave a signal to one of his attendants.

"I am sorry I have only one specimen of the *Coelogyne* in question with me," he said, receiving a box from his man, and opening it to disclose the tubercular roots of a rare, epiphytal orchid, clinging tenaciously like a parasite to a piece of the moss-covered branch of a tree.

"I beg to remind you that I offered the wager first," Lord Sherbrooke said quickly, regarding the embryo plant covetously.

Shadakhari smiled, retaining the box nevertheless.

"I had a different project in view, which I think will be agreeable to everybody," he said. "The Claverton Prize is, I understand, considered the highest award in the whole exhibition. The winner of that award may, if he chooses, wager with me for the amount of the Prize."

It was the consensus of opinion that that eliminated all except Parkinson and Lord Sherbrooke, but none could take exception to the fairness of the offer. Everyone felt that one of these two would have appropriated the honour in any

case. It added considerably to the speculation which was rife as to which of the two would be the winner.

After a very protracted deliberation on the part of the judges, Parkinson's exhibits gained an aggregate of exactly one point more than those of Lord Sherbrooke. Shadakhari added his to the general congratulations, and held out the box containing the *Coelogynina* to the Master of Moatlands Park.

"I shall feel honoured if you will accept this," he said, adding: "The amount of the wager is of no consequence, Mr. Parkinson. I am willing to drop it altogether, or increase it if you wish."

"I should like it to stand on the original terms," Parkinson replied. "It will add a zest to the notion."

"Then I will make arrangements to deposit a thousand guineas with your bankers," Shadakhari said, satisfied.

"And the time limit?" Parkinson asked him.

"In the jungle this orchid blooms only once, and at different ages," Shadakhari answered. "Some I have watched have required from ten to fifteen years to develop. As this particular specimen is but a few months old, that will give you plenty of time to try to discover the secret of its cultivation, without which you cannot possibly be successful. I shall be content to wait, say twenty years, if that suits you."

Parkinson hesitated. It was strange that at that moment he should remember Haggerty's prophecy concerning himself.

Fear of her had given place temporarily to other interests, but he found himself wondering how much longer he had to live. Ten years was more than he hoped.

"I will lengthen the time limit if you like," the Hindoo said.

"It is long enough," Parkinson replied, thrusting his doubts aside. "In case I should not live so long, I will make arrangements to cover my end of the wager also."

"The adherents of my religion are fatalists, but I respect your caution," Shadakhari smiled. "I understand that according to your English law death of either party terminates a contract. My chief desire is to ascertain if the *Coelogynina* can be cultivated, and, in case of your failure, I had purposed donating the money to the Brighton hospital. If death should take the matter out of your hands before you are successful, I should be pleased if some other gentleman would undertake to carry on the wager."


"My brother, Sir Philip Parkinson . . ." the Master of Moatlands Park began. He stopped, thinking again of Haggerty's prophecy, this time as it concerned his brother also. He was not sorry that his hesitation was covered by a chorus of eager assent from some of the other growers.

Wilson was present at the Exhibition in charge of the Moatlands Park exhibits, and Parkinson handed the orchid over to his care.

Almost immediately on his return to Moatlands Park, he added a codicil to his will concerning it.

CHAPTER XV

CRAWFORD AND WILSON SAIL FOR INDIA



DURING the weeks that followed, Richard Parkinson found that he had undertaken a new anxiety which, however, tended to eliminate still farther his fear of Haggerty and the remembrance of her unwholesome divination. The new orchid was the most difficult specimen he had ever tackled. He had shelves of literature on the subject of orchid culture; his bookseller in London ransacked every known source to obtain others for him, but, although he read everything he could concerning *Coelogyninae*, the plant refused to respond to any form of treatment. Indeed, what there was of it appeared gradually to dry out, the excrescent roots becoming shriveled and hardened like the shells of walnuts. He became again morose as the signs of defeat increased.

But he was as obstinate as the plant itself, and the harder the proportions the task of cultivating it assumed, the more determined he became to cultivate it, no matter what means he had to adopt. After several months of this, he determined to have recourse to the only plan that seemed still open to him. Shadakhari had mentioned probing the secret of the orchid's existence, and there was only one place where that

CRAWFORD AND WILSON SAIL 153


secret could be probed. He sent Wilson to India, with instructions to remain there until he had traced the orchid to its native haunts in the jungle, there to make a note of every condition of its growth, or until he was otherwise instructed to return.

Three weeks after Wilson sailed on the "SS. Pandora" another circumstance arose which put the orchid temporarily out of his thoughts. That was the breakdown of the existing Conservative Government. This meant a strenuously contested general election. A staunch member of his party, Parkinson put his soul into his efforts to secure the return of the same government. He worked his own campaign for re-election with an ardour which, powerful landowner though he was, indicated how deep-rooted was his fear of losing his seat. As it was, he was one of the few Conservative members re-elected by anything like a majority. With a Liberal Government in power, he became one of the keenest opposition members, and he was asked by the defeated Prime Minister to accept a portfolio should his government come again into power at a later date. That, and the necessity of personal supervision in the matter of his hybrids for the next Exhibition, kept his mind fully occupied. Haggerty was almost forgotten.

Wilson was away nearly two years. During that time two things of importance happened. The first was an unexpected visit from Crawford.

Parkinson had not seen him more than half a dozen times since Mildred's death. There had been very little to bring Crawford to Moatlands Park. With his own set views con-

cerning psycho-telepathy, he could not reconcile himself to Parkinson's reiterated belief in the transmigration of Haggerty's soul. The scratch on the baby's wrist, which had healed promptly, might easily have been made with a pin. The raven's feather was merely a coincidence. Mrs. Parkinson might have had that in her possession as well as the icon. Everything accorded exactly with his own theories. From what he had heard it was easy to conclude that Mrs. Parkinson had been afraid of Haggerty. Her fear, combined with the occult mechanism of the melting icon, was probably aggravated by the subconscious utterances of the maid Haggerty had used as her medium. It was the girl alone who was still a mystery.



Entire lack of success had attended every effort to restore her elusive memory. With every active, present faculty alert and responsive, her mind was still an absolute blank regarding her own identity. The name Lois Delarge, which she had given to Mildred as her real name, meant nothing to her. Crawford despaired of elucidating that mystery. Now, circumstances would take her from under his immediate observation. It was those circumstances that brought him now to Moatlands Park.

He was leaving the country for an indefinite period, and had not only resigned from his various public appointments, but had made over the entire practice at Harley Street to his partner, Dr. Eustace Vyvyan.

Parkinson, immune from further trouble at Haggerty's hands, received the information with equanimity. After Crawford had explained, he remarked genially: "You are

CRAWFORD AND WILSON SAIL 155

fortunate to be able to retire so young, Dr. Crawford. There must be money in the medical profession after all."

"A legacy is responsible in this case," Crawford replied.

"Then please accept my condolences with my congratulations."

"The Psychic Research Club has been badgering me for some time to undertake a special expedition into the fastnesses of Thibet," Crawford continued. "The members of the Club offered to finance it, but I preferred to have independent means behind me. The legacy makes that possible . . . makes it possible for me to pander to my persistent thirst for knowledge of Oriental occultism."

"You have already wound up your affairs, you say?"

"I have, quite successfully."

"Then I take it you will soon be leaving?"

"In a month or so. I wished to ascertain if I could be of any further service to you in the meantime."

"It is kind of you to suggest it," Parkinson said. "So far, the advice you gave me has proved very effective, and I appreciate the trouble you have taken in my affairs. Your advice started me on the right road, and all the while such chaos exists at Westminster I shall have my hands full. Oh, pardon me," he added quickly, for Crawford's smile had not escaped his notice, "I didn't stop to think that you might perhaps be Liberal in your views."

"I must confess to impartiality," Crawford replied, still smiling. "I have had little time for the consideration of the merits of the various political parties, and now I am afraid I shall have still less."

"You have your science, and I my politics and orchids," Parkinson said. "*Chacun à son métier!*"

"You haven't seen any more of the raven?"

"Nothing since I had them all destroyed."

"You probably killed it with the rest," Crawford remarked. "There was no reason for supposing that it bore a charmed life."

"Then you are no nearer believing in physical reincarnation?" Parkinson queried.

"On the contrary, I am persuaded against it," Crawford answered.

"Yet you believe in *the* resurrection?"

"Certainly."

"Then why should not a daughter of hell . . . ?"

"Since we last discussed the matter, I have seen no reason for altering my views," Crawford said. "I am convinced that Mrs. Parkinson was murdered under Haggerty's spirit influence, and that it was accomplished as the result of a pre-nurtured scheme."

"You mean there must be something physically tangible for her to work with?"

"Precisely."

"There is still the possibility of spirit materialization," Parkinson doubted.

"Something in the nature of a ghost?" Crawford queried.

"Yes. Don't you believe in ghosts?"

"To a certain extent yes," Crawford said hesitatingly. He did not want to go too deeply into that subject with Par-

kinson, and was wondering how he could turn him away from it.

"You have never seen one?"

"No, and I don't think that is because I have been specially unprivileged. I think I am fairly correct in my own view that seeing a ghost is the direct result of some internal psychic force . . . some internal process for which the person himself is almost directly responsible . . . such as fear, keen desire inspired by fear, or some other quickly acting emotion. Such emotion is frequently concentrative and positive; result, the thing imagined materializes into something apparently seen . . . an optical illusion. That is my plain, unvarnished opinion, derived from many of the faking séances I have attended. Believe me, Mr. Parkinson, I am equally convinced that you will never see Haggerty's ghost, because you are going to continue throwing off the least suspicion of influence from her."

"You have greater confidence in me than I have in myself," Parkinson said. "In one respect you may be right, however. I don't expect to see Haggerty's ghost, but no argument will rid me of the impression that if I see anything at all, at any time, it will not be a spirit materialization, but Haggerty in the flesh."

Crawford saw that it was useless to argue that question with him any more, so he said: "You make me sorry I am leaving the country. I envy you the chance of seeing the first physical resurrection since the days of Christ!"

"Well, to my mind there does not seem to be much disparity between the powers of the dominant forces for good

158 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

and evil," Parkinson argued. He added: "If I want to write to you at any time, what is the best way to get you?"

"I am glad you are thinking of communicating with me," Crawford replied with alacrity. "I shall feel that I am not altogether excluded from future interest in Moatlands Park. Any mail addressed to me at the Psychic Research Club in Piccadilly will be forwarded immediately; or my successor, Dr. Vyvyan, would be glad to communicate with me if you telephoned him. No matter where I am, if ever you need my help, and I can get here in time, I shall be pleased to come."

"I appreciate your kindness, but . . . if Haggerty strikes again as she has already done twice, there won't be much time for anyone to render assistance. If you came, it would only be to discover the means she employed, as you did in the case of my wife . . . when it was too late. However, if you think Dr. Vyvyan could help . . . "

"Only by sending for me," Crawford said. "He is not a psychist. I think he will be glad to get rid of me, and so disencumber himself of what he calls my spooky ideas. He is as skilful as any as a mental specialist, but there is this difference between us. He is a doctor . . . I, a scientist."

"A difference which covers considerable territory, I have no doubt," Parkinson replied.

"Your little daughter grows more charming all the time," Crawford changed the subject again, after a pause.

"Daughter? Oh, yes. Evelyn is coming along splendidly."

CRAWFORD AND WILSON SAIL 159

Parkinson was taken off his guard of self-composure at this abrupt mention of his daughter. She was rarely mentioned to him, and he had not even seen her for several days.

"I met the nurse with her as I was coming up the drive from the lake," Crawford explained.

"Yes, the child is all right," Parkinson said again. It was evident he did not wish to continue that topic.

"And Sir Philip? I hope he is well."

"Perfectly, so he says. I am expecting a visit from him soon. He writes that the trouble in the Balkans is lessening considerably. As you know, there was never much more than smoke. No need for him to have gone there at all. He is trying to get leave of absence now. There are many things we need to discuss.

"I can quite understand that," Crawford said.

"One thing about that I feel I ought to tell you, in case you took a wrong impression," Parkinson went on quickly. "That talk of Haggerty's . . . connecting Philip with my wife . . . I discovered, of course, it was a concoction of lies."

"That was my impression from the first," Crawford assured him. "My opinion of the Parkinson honour was not shaken."

"Thanks for saying so," Parkinson returned, relieved. "I am glad I mentioned it. I can't understand Philip being content to swelter in such a climate as that when there is no need," he continued, airing his perpetual grievance.

Crawford laughed.

"*Chacun à son métier* seems to be one of your mottoes," he said. "Sir Philip is an enthusiast like ourselves. You are

content to bury yourself in an uncomfortable seat in the House of Commons; I am burning with anxiety to submit myself to the rigors of the Indian climate in the cause of science."

"You will stay to lunch?" the Squire invited him.

"I would like you to excuse me," Crawford answered. "I have an appointment in town for the early afternoon, otherwise I should esteem it a pleasure. I do esteem it an honour. Is that the Royal Society Cup?"

"Yes."

Parkinson walked to the fireplace and fetched the Cup for his visitor's inspection.

"I was certain of winning this," he said. "The Claver-ton Prize was a greater achievement. You didn't take in the Exhibition, did you?"

"I couldn't get away for it."

"I made a remarkable wager with a Hindoo named Shadakhari. He had with him a *Coelogynina*, very immature, which he defied any of the English growers to cultivate. I am beginning to realize that it is a doubtful proposition, but I have sent Wilson to India to ascertain its native elements."

"Wilson is fortunate," Crawford smiled.

"He is a good man," Parkinson returned. "He needed a change. It will give him a chance to get over his regard for Marie, and his sorrow at her death. I believe he was deeply attached to her. Would you care to see Shadakhari's orchid?"


CRAWFORD AND WILSON SAIL 161

He led the way into the fernery, further explaining the conditions of the wager. Crawford left him after he had examined the orchid superficially. He was not interested in orchid culture.



CHAPTER XVI

SIR PHILIP AND BABY EVELYN



NEARLY four months passed before Sir Philip was able to get his leave of absence. Always a center of unrest, the Balkan States had again been hit by one of those sudden, volcano-like eruptions which might have precipitated a European war, but which, fortunately, had subsided as quickly as it had sprung into being.

It was the first time he had visited Moatlands Park since his memorable conversation with Mildred, and his equally momentous ride with her to consult Haggerty. Much had happened since then. Mildred and Haggerty were both dead. The silence of the park, denuded of its ravens, descended upon him like a mantle of gloom. As on that previous occasion, he allowed his horse to meander quietly along from the lodge gates, and beside the shore of the lake.

It was far from a pleasant home-coming. Strenuous work, submersion in diplomatic strategy . . . neither had been able to eradicate from his mind Mildred's farewell kiss. Through all those months of indefatigable labor the delicate fragrance of her lips had clung to his. Riding under those tenantless trees, through a silence that seemed to penetrate his soul with presentiments of calamity, it was yet impossible


for him to realize that she was dead. Perhaps with her death the bond of affection that had fettered him to her while she was alive had become even more indissoluble. Who knows! She was no more impossible to him now than she had been then, with her sublime constancy to her unappreciative husband, and her almost superhuman purity.

Sir Philip had changed much during the bare two years that had elapsed since that last visit. He rode his horse with the same erectness, the same easy grace; but his hair was fast turning grey about the temples, and there were lines upon his face which only a deep sorrow could have chiseled. Miles away, sweating in the vortex of a whirlpool of turbulent race animosity, he had still been the one person on earth to suffer keenly at Mildred's tragic death. Perhaps, with that telepathy which links kindred souls, he of all men had felt the passing of hers. Again who knows! Sir Philip's lips were sealed touching those poignant matters, and, with love for Mildred still ardent within him, he was glad rather than otherwise that no other woman could even stir those passionate chords of his nature that were dedicated to her memory.

He wondered what her child would be like . . . had often spent long, wakeful nights wondering that. The infant, would be nearly fifteen months old now, possibly toddling around, delighting those in charge of her with her baby graces and baby efforts to frame baby thoughts into articulate language. He had heard very little about her from Richard, who had seldom written except when correspondence was demanded by matters of business, and more rarely still had he mentioned Mildred's little girl. Then he had

referred only to Sir Philip's possible guardianship of the child in the event that he himself should predecease him.

Yet another thing had caused Sir Philip many sleepless nights. He knew the bare details of Richard's visit to Haggerty, the tragic death of Marie which had occasioned that visit, and the subsequent events. One thing in particular he did not know, and that was to what extent the witch's disclosures had gone. If Richard knew of his sentiments for Mildred, he had not said anything; but that in itself was no indication that he did not know. Reasoning along these lines brought another point into prominence in Sir Philip's mind. Presuming that Richard knew, in what way had his knowledge of it affected his attitude towards Mildred? Mildred's death was due to Haggerty's hideous sorcery, but what had Mildred's life been during those months of waiting for her baby to be born!



There had been times when Sir Philip had struggled hard against the impulse to demand closer information from his brother, especially since Mildred's death, when nothing he said could longer affect her. Even now, as he continued his ride across the broadlands of the park, and the house itself came nearer and nearer, he found it difficult to stifle his accusing thoughts. Such thoughts had a tendency to raise an unsurmountable barrier between him and his brother.

It was Richard who broke it down. His pleasure at seeing his brother was unfeigned, and he greeted him cordially.

"You should have told me you were arriving, Philip," he said. "I could at least have met you in London."

"There was hardly time," Sir Philip replied. "I scram-

bled my leave at the first moment, and arrived in London only last night. I have not yet reported to Whitehall."

"I suppose that is necessary?"

"Just a mere formality. Anticipating my leave, the Foreign Secretary intimated by letter that he would like to see me when it was convenient. There is plenty of time for that. For once I considered that family matters had prior claim to my attention . . . and here I am."

Richard smiled reminiscently.

"Always the same Philip," he observed. "In the back of my mind I have come to believe that those matters were always of deeper concern to you than you ever admitted."

The Squire's manner was so ingenuous that Sir Philip could discern nothing pointed in the words. He read them at their true value. So he refrained from making any comment. His brother went on: "You had better take the rest of the morning to look round, and become re-acclimatized. How long are you staying?"

"I had hardly thought of taking up residence here," Sir Philip answered.

"Nonsense!" Richard expostulated. "Telephone in for your wardrobe to be sent out. You have as much as you want here anyway. Peters has been getting it ready in anticipation of this visit, and he can get you anything of mine that you lack."

"Then I think I'll stay," Sir Philip said. He had been gradually thawing under the warmth of Richard's welcome.

"Good!" the Squire replied. "You won't mind excusing me for a couple of hours, will you? I have some business

166 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

I must attend to. Of course, had I known you were coming . . . ”

“I’ll come with you, if you like,” Sir Philip suggested.

“I wouldn’t hear of it. You need a rest. Make yourself comfortable by the time I return.”

The last time it had been, “Stay and amuse Mildred!” Richard observed some shadow of the pain that stabbed at his brother’s heart at this remembrance, and he added kindly: “I know the place is not the same for you, Philip. You will miss Mildred. You and she were such great friends. Unlike myself, you have not grown accustomed to the Manor without her.”

And he held out his hand with an unusually spontaneous gesture. As Sir Philip gripped it, the glance that passed between them told him that his brother knew, and that the knowledge could no longer occasion any bitterness between them.

Coupled with the knowledge that Richard knew was the certainty that he intended to extend to him cordial hospitality. Sir Philip was aware of a feeling of relief as he watched his brother’s departure. With Peters he went over the wardrobe he had always maintained in his own rooms at the Manor; which rooms, even when his absences from the family seat had become prolonged, were still restricted to his own use. Peters had made it a special point to see that everything of his was ready for immediate use. Sir Philip felt more at ease when he had donned a lounge suit which, although not exactly of current fashion, was as good

as anything he could have procured at his bachelor establishment in Westbourne Grove.

Questioning Peters, he learned in which direction the nurse was wont to go with her juvenile charge. He wanted to see Mildred's daughter.

His path, through the rose gardens, with perennials casting their fragrance on either hand, recalled his last conversation with Mildred. It was her favorite walk. He could fancy that somewhere over those gardens she had loved, her spirit was hovering to watch with jealous eyes the gambols of her offspring, seeking to afford the maternal protection denied to her by her tragic death.

Before he reached the clematis bower where she had been accustomed to sit, he heard sounds of joyous laughter, and he turned towards a part of the gardens screened from his view by masses of shrubs. Thus he came to the central lawn, with its fountain and carefully rolled grass.

By the fountain, leaning half over the parapet, was the baby Evelyn. The nurse was holding the back of her rompers to keep her from tumbling into the water. They had come to feed the golden carp with crumbs, and Evelyn was trying to catch the eager fish with her chubby fingers.

What a lot of joy Richard was missing! Sir Philip was sure his brother had never watched her play, had never caught her up in his arms to hug her and kiss her, and call her those endearing names which are as necessary as food to the health of a child. Sir Philip wanted to do that as he walked towards them.

The nurse heard him coming, and stood up at once. Evelyn rolled awkwardly over until she sat by the fountain facing him, and regarding him with solemn eyes. The nurse was a stranger to Sir Philip, so he explained: "I am Sir Philip Parkinson. I don't want to interrupt your play, but this is the first opportunity I have had of becoming acquainted with my little niece."

"Pardon me, Sir Philip; I didn't know," the nurse said. Then she picked the child up and presented her. "This is your uncle, Miss Evelyn."

Miss Evelyn . . . to a child of fifteen months! "What formal dignity!" Sir Philip thought. Was there no one to call her 'darling'? To the nurse he said: "Do you always call her that?"

"They are the Squire's instructions, sir," the girl answered, recovering from her confusion.

"I understand that the Squire would wish it before strangers," Sir Philip went on. "In the intimacy of your play it surely is different. She has been deprived of her mother. Is there no one can fill a mother's place until she is old enough to understand?"

The nurse hesitated a moment, but she could not misinterpret his anxious, kindly glance. With an impulsive gesture she hugged the little one closer, while the baby nestled on her bosom in happy contentment.

"Indeed yes, sir!" she exclaimed. "We all love her. She is the sweetest darling that ever breathed. Even the butler likes to dance her upon his knee, and the footmen hug her if I ever give them a chance."

"Thank God for that!" Sir Philip breathed so fervently that the girl knew her impulse to tell him had not been wrong. "To let her feel that she is loved will be doing her the greatest kindness in the world."

"Who could help loving her?" The nurse was becoming rapidly charmed with Sir Philip's demeanor. "Perhaps, sir . . . ?" She made a tentative motion of holding Evelyn towards him.

He had never held a child in his arms, but why should he not hold this one, who was so different! Such was the thought the girl's action instantly prompted. Flesh of Mildred's flesh . . . blood of her blood . . . his soul cried out within him that by holding her in his arms he might discover hallowed contact with his dead love. Why should he not satisfy the longing that had surged within him as he had watched Evelyn's gambols at the fountain—that longing which had loosened again the volume of his pent-up love! Why should the butler and the other men-servants be privileged beyond himself, who had the greater right! He might be starting a revolution in the Parkinson code, but any scruples he had on that score were fully overcome as, when he held out his arms in response to the nurse's invitation, Baby Evelyn at once signified her willingness to go to him, and he felt the soft warmth of her chubby arms round his neck.

That was one of the happiest hours of his life, and passed all too quickly. Richard had already returned when he left the rose gardens, and was in the orchid house, expecting to find him there.

"You haven't lost your interest in the family hobby, Philip?" Richard questioned.

"The orchids would have had my attention had I not been otherwise occupied," Sir Philip answered lightly. "I have been delightfully entertained by Evelyn," he added. "We were playing with the goldfish in the rose gardens."

"The nurse often takes her there, I believe," Richard said. "Do you think she is growing like Mildred?"

"It is rather early yet to pick up striking resemblances," Sir Philip smiled. "But I thought I could discern traces of both Mildred and you, Richard."

"Unless she develops some points of character later, there will be nothing of the Parkinsons in her at all," Richard declared in half negation to the latter part of his brother's remark. "Even the name will die with her marriage. You are still as firmly convinced that you will never marry?"

"Absolutely."

"Perhaps it is as well. I would not care for a son of yours to feel that his rightful position here was being usurped by a mere girl . . . my daughter."

"If a son of mine took after me, he would never feel that way," Sir Philip said warmly. "You know, Richard, I never had any pretensions to the estate. However, had Evelyn never been born, it would not make the slightest difference to my determination never to marry."

"Is one woman worth so much constancy?" Richard asked him.

"When one loves, Richard, the thought is more of consecration than of constancy," Sir Philip answered.

"You are an enigma to me, Philip," the Squire replied. "Sometimes I think . . . I wish you could see it that way too, and forget Mildred . . . that it was Haggerty who inspired your love in the first place . . . using it in her evil conniving for the destruction of our house."

Sir Philip had started when his brother first mentioned Mildred. But Richard had continued to speak in the same matter-of-fact tones as he would use in discussing an event of simple domestic importance, so he waited for him to finish before he asked: "You knew I loved her?"

"Not before you had left for the Balkans. Had I been more discerning, I might have connected Mildred with your protracted absences . . . your admission to me that you loved another man's wife. It was Haggerty who first told me, when I went with Crawford to try to trace Marie's death to her. Afterwards, I heard the complete details from Mildred herself."

Sir Philip said nothing. He was amazed at the quiet manner in which his brother was speaking. His amazement increased as Richard continued: "I owe you an apology, Philip. At first I so far forgot myself as to accuse Mildred of being your mistress . . . the baby to be born, issue from you. It was an unpardonable breach of confidence in her, and in you. My only excuse is that everything seemed to point that way . . . your admission to me, your desire to go away, your solicitations on Mildred's behalf . . . her revelation of her approaching motherhood, of which you were aware before myself. I was not jealous, Philip. I could never love any woman sufficiently to provoke such a sentiment. Perhaps

that was fortunate, because jealousy is insanity when suspicions are once aroused. Mildred forgave me. My one hope now is that you will do the same. It was a thing I could not very well write about, so I awaited this opportunity to discuss it with you personally."

Sir Philip's hand was already stretched out towards him. Richard, grasping it, said: "Thanks, Philip. I hope the fact that we understand each other will not be the cause of further estrangement between us. There is no reason why it should."

"Certainly not," Sir Philip returned warmly. "It is the first time we have really understood each other. I am immensely relieved . . . more relieved than I can tell you . . . that you were able to let Mildred's virtues annihilate any thought of her inconstancy to you. I wish you could find it in your heart to go a step farther, and appropriate for yourself some of the happiness the servants are obtaining through their love for Evelyn."

"You think they love her?"

"They do more than that. They worship her."

Richard sighed.

"You are an eloquent advocate, Philip," he said, "first for Mildred, and now for her child. I am sorry that I cannot respond. I can never forget that Evelyn's birth destroyed all our family traditions; that our honoured race, progressing in wealth and prestige for centuries, is doomed to die through the accident of that birth. With you it is different, will always be different, perhaps. I hope so, with all my

heart. You loved her mother, Philip; you will love her . . not in the same way, of course. After I am gone, she will be yours to train and educate in the way that both you and Mildred would have desired. Honestly, Philip, and without prejudice, I sometimes wish she did belong to you. With love such as is denied me in your heart, you would make a better father to her than I could ever hope to be. If I should die suddenly, I want you, immediately after my death, to relinquish the career you value so highly, and take up your residence here as Evelyn's guardian. Am I asking too much?"

"I hope the necessity will never arise," Sir Philip said. "For the matter of Evelyn's guardianship, you but anticipate my wish. But . . have you never considered marrying again?"

"I have, but will not do so. All the while Haggerty's curse rests upon this house, I should consider it an unpardonable offense to include another woman in the curse."

"I remember you wrote something about your theory of her future reincarnation, but you were not very explicit," Sir Philip observed. "Of course, you saw all that happened, while I did not. Tell me what gave you the idea, Richard."

"It was what Haggerty herself told me to expect," the Squire replied. "She told me that she would not live long enough for the law to expedite her departure, but she warned me that she would come back from the grave to fulfil her curse on the House of Parkinson. Crawford pooh-poohs the idea. You don't know Crawford, do you?"

"Not personally. I have heard of him otherwise than through you. I think his opinion would be substantial."

"Perfectly sound, so far as he understands things. At the same time, clever though he is in matters of psychic research, there is one thing missing in his education."

"What is that?" Sir Philip queried.

"The personal touch. Because his own life has never been immediately implicated in such hellish sorcery as Haggerty practices, he places a limit on possibilities. For myself, I don't believe any limitation can be placed on the powers of hell."

"So that is how you have come to believe in reincarnation?"

"Crawford will not even admit the feasibility of transmigration."

"You really think that Haggerty's raven was present . . . when Mildred died?" Sir Philip questioned.

"I see nothing else to account for the feather that was found on her pillow," Richard answered. "You should know Mildred well enough to know that she would not keep such an object as that, for any conceivable or inconceivable reason. As for that girl's story about finding the infernal image in a drawer in Mildred's room . . . ! Crawford may think the whole thing is as clear to him as water, but my opinion is that he has allowed himself to be fooled by what he considers true revelation from that girl."

"You think, in her condition, she could lie to him?"

"I don't say she would do it intentionally . . . could do it intentionally. But don't you see what I am driving at,

Philip?" the Squire went on heatedly. "Crawford's idea is that the girl, acting under spirit compulsion, found the image, found the feather . . perhaps scratched Evelyn's wrist in order to lend color to the scheme. He is convinced that spirit influence could make her do all that. Well, then, why . . as she did everything that that spirit influence intended her to do, was it necessary for her to lose her memory entirely? What else was there that she could have revealed that would not fit in with the devilish scheme? The loss of memory seems to me a subterfuge to prevent her from revealing what are perhaps the truer facts in the case . . that the same influence that stole her memory compelled her, to a certain extent, to lie in order to deceive."

"Did you offer these ideas to Crawford?" Sir Philip asked.

"No. They did not occur to me until after he had gone away. They did not come to me all at once, but bit by bit. Crawford agreed that I might be subject to influence from her, the same sort of influence. He said I could throw it off, and sometimes I think I have succeeded. But I tell you candidly, Philip, that she haunts me. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, and fancy I see her . . as plainly as I see you. I imagine I hear her speaking to me, telling me that the whole of her abominable prophecy will be fulfilled. At such times I am paralyzed with fear, and can't move. I can't even speak. That is how Mildred died. Philip! Both Crawford and Dr. Matthews are agreed that before she died she was paralyzed with fear!"

"Good heavens, Richard!" Sir Philip exclaimed. "You'll be losing your reason if you give way to an obsession like that!"

At that Richard laughed. "That is exactly what Haggerty foretells," he said. "That is exactly what is going to happen. It is an obsession. Crawford says I can throw it off, but it gets me when I am powerless to resist . . . when I am asleep. When I am awake, I *can* throw it off. To prove that, let us go to the fernery again. I have something there to show you."

Wondering at his brother's change of manner, though considerably relieved, Sir Philip followed him from the library, to which room they had gone. As they entered the fernery, it occurred to him what they were going to see. In one of his brief letters, Richard had told him that he had sent Wilson to India.

"You mentioned something about a *Coelogynina*, and a wager with a fellow named Shadakhari, wasn't it?" he enquired.

"Yes," Richard answered. "It is that I want to show you. I was forgetting I had told you about it. Here it is. Shadakhari is confident it cannot be cultivated. Wilson wanted a change, so I sent him to India to learn something about the natural conditions in which it grows. If I don't live to benefit from any information he gets, you may. Sherbrooke, Eastham, Crichton, and goodness knows who were there when the wager was made. It was a challenge to them all . . . to all English growers, in fact. Sherbrooke in particular wanted to get this orchid, so for the honour of Moat-

lands Park we have got to get some approach to a flower on it. I say we, because I thought you would like to try if I failed. I have added a codicil to my will about it, not that that makes any difference, for all the orchids are bequeathed to you. It was merely to bring it into prominence. It looks hopeless at present, doesn't it? But while there's a spark of life in the confounded thing, we've got to encourage it."

Sir Philip had the orchid in his hands while his brother finished speaking. His examination of it, with his mind on the strange things Richard had said during their talk in the library, did not excite much enthusiasm. It had the appearance of a hopeless proposition anyway. The piece of tree to which it clung as a parasite was sapless, while the bulbous roots had shrunk more since Richard had last looked at it. Altogether it showed little or no sign of possessing even the elements of life.

"If it doesn't die before Wilson gets back," the Squire added, ruefully contemplating the diminishing plant.

"Just what I was thinking," Sir Philip returned. "It doesn't look at all promising."

It was on the point of his tongue to add: "And if it, too, is not subject to Haggerty's curse!"

But he restrained the impulse, thinking it inadvisable to reopen the subject of Haggerty and her curse!

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND FEATHER

SIR Philip stayed the greater part of two weeks, and during that time he lost no opportunity of bringing Evelyn's rights before her father. Frequently he inveigled him into accompanying him to where he knew the child and her nurse would be found. Sir Philip never ceased to idolize her, and soon Richard, too, began to feel the love of the child contagious. It began by his feeling himself under constraint, at first merely for the sake of appearances, to take an interest in her himself. For a little while that interest grew even beyond Sir Philip's eager anticipation. It continued for a few weeks after Sir Philip left. Then another matter took the thoughts of his daughter completely out of his mind.


That was the first year that orchids from Moatlands Park were not represented at the Exhibition. Parkinson had imported no fresh varieties, thinking to utilize some of the species he had obtained the previous year, and which had met with such marked success. It was not long before he knew he was doomed to failure. A blight appeared to settle on them all. No matter what he did, they would not thrive. The botanist who specialized in South American plants at

the County Horticultural College came to give him a consultation on them, with no better result. To all appearances, the failure of the orchids to respond to cultivation signified the second step in the retrogression of Moatlands Park prestige. That was how the Squire regarded it, and that fact immediately annulled the improvement Sir Philip had managed to achieve in other directions. Through the orchids, in less than three months, Parkinson was back again in that spirit of morbidity from which Crawford's advice had temporarily rescued him.

A cablegram ^{to} from the Calcutta bankers that Wilson was returning with the desired information did not do much to arouse him from his apathy. It would be too late then to do anything for the Exhibition, and his sense of failure was so keen that nothing could rid him of it. Haggerty and her prophecies were never out of his thoughts. He could detect her invisible influence everywhere. He thought the same as Sir Philip had thought . . . the thought he had not expressed . . . that the orchids might also be under the bane of her curse. To what other cause could his failure with them be attributed!

At one time he thought of sending for Crawford; but then what was the use? Even if Crawford did not discredit the influence, he would probably arrive too late to do anything. When Haggerty struck, she struck quickly . . . too quickly for human interference.

Beset by the fear that Haggerty's curse was really materializing, it was not difficult for him to believe that he was going insane. Strange fancies haunted him day and night.



There was no longer that sense of paralyzation when he awoke suddenly. It was a long time before he actually saw her, though in his dreams she was there. Waking with a start, he would stare for long periods into the darkness of his room, expecting to visualize her standing there, where he had seen her before, often imagining, until he summoned sufficient courage to procure a light, that he could see her pointing at him with a menacing finger. Once, in the park, he picked up a stray feather like a raven's, and sent it to an ornithologist to ascertain the species of the bird that had dropped it. Then he disbelieved the report he received that it was the wing feather of a migrating crow.

Becoming perturbed about his condition, Dr. Matthews advised him to consult Dr. Vyvyan. Parkinson refused; so obsessed was he with the idea that he did not need the opinion of an alienist to tell him that his mind was rapidly becoming unhinged. He was equally convinced that Dr. Vyvyan could do nothing for him. More than that, he thought the report from an alienist would be like that he had received from the ornithologist, discrediting what he himself knew to be fact. So he refused to consult anybody. He shut himself up as a recluse, rarely even seeing the servants in his own dining-room, most of his food being brought to him by Peters, either to the library or his own bedroom suite.

From the date of his receipt of the cablegram from Calcutta to the day of Wilson's return was a period of six weeks. Only once during that time did Parkinson look at Shadakhari's orchid, and then to put it away again in disgust.

It showed still less promise of life. He had already decided that Wilson's journey had been wasted, so he was not very interested in the gardener's return. And the night before Wilson got there something happened which put the thoughts of cultivating the orchid still farther from his mind.

That night he saw Haggerty, and, whether before he had really seen her or not, this time it was no hallucination.

Everything was quiet in the Manor as Michello made his way stealthily through the kitchen gardens, and, with the skill of an expert, noiselessly opened the catch on one of the kitchen windows, and climbed through the raised sash. His previously acquired knowledge of the architecture of the house led him unerringly from the kitchen to the library, where he opened the door leading into the fernery to admit his mother. He waited in the library until she returned, to close the door again behind her, and make his own exit by the way he had entered.

Haggerty made her equally unerring way to Parkinson's bedroom, which seemed to imply that it was not the first time she had been there. Parkinson was sleeping, and she stood regarding him fixedly until he stirred uneasily. Then she made some rapid passes over his face, and over his body, her motions extending from his head to his feet. As his eyes opened she slunk back into the shadows of the darker part of the room, so that she was only half visible to his startled gaze. He tried to speak, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; he tried to move, but there was the same paralytic rigidity controlling his body as he had experienced

before. Beads of perspiration broke out upon him as he listened to her almost whispered, yet easily audible words.

"I told you I should come back from the grave to wreak my vengeance upon you, Richard Parkinson," she said slowly. "For you that vengeance is nearly completed. I have come to you before to make your fear of me bind you hand and foot. In your fear of me you shall die, before much more time shall have passed. It has been for you to see my spirit clothed again in the flesh, as I shall appear before others of your accursed blood when their time has come. You have thought to destroy the familiar which is of my spirit, but you shall see it again. Then you will know that your doom is close at hand."

Terror gripped him as she was speaking, yet he did not try again to utter a sound. He realized his impotency against this spirit of evil, whether flesh and blood he knew not. Crawford had told him that his fear of Haggerty would lend itself to the conjuring up of such a wraith as he saw before him, half hidden in the darkness. Crawford had told him he could resist, yet he strained his blood-flecked eyes to see the creature more distinctly. She appeared to be expanding into unnatural proportions as she moved silently towards him, until an overwhelming terror made him close his eyes to shut out the horrid vision. When he opened them again she was gone.

He did not hear the opening and closing of the door behind her. Neither did he hear her padded footsteps as she descended the stairs, hastening to the library where Michello was awaiting her. Not a word passed between her and her

son as he opened the door of the fernery for her to pass through. Before making her final exit from the fernery, she paused to pick up the orchid of the wager, and to conceal it in a part of the building where it would not readily be found.

Richard Parkinson remained still for perhaps half an hour after she had left him, peering into the shadows, thinking to see her again. Even though the power of movement came again perceptibly into his muscles, he made no attempt to summon the assistance of Peters. Whether she had been of flesh and blood or not, he was convinced that no power on earth could overtake her. His one rational thought was that he did not want to raise a commotion. He would show her, knowing he was doomed, that a Parkinson could face his end quietly.

From her words, he gathered that the raven had not been killed. He thought it was another hallucination of his disordered mind when, thinking of the bird, he saw a shadow fluttering on the other side of the blind covering his window. That was until he heard the raucous, mocking cry of the raven. Then he leaped out of bed, and drew the blind. He was in time to see the raven flying, in the moonlight, towards the shore of the lake.

Wilson reported in the morning before he had left his room. Parkinson sent for him to come there, dismissing Peters as Wilson entered. The gardener started to make his report, but his master would not listen.

"I haven't sent for you to tell me about that, and I have

no time to listen to it," he said sharply. "I want you to complete the job you failed in before you left."

"What is that, sir?" Wilson asked him, failing immediately to understand.

"That infernal raven . . . it is still alive. I saw it myself last night. It was there, against my window. It flew towards the lake. Get a gun and go after it, if you have to follow it to hell!"

Wilson was not surprised that his master's manner was agitated. If he had really seen the raven again, that fact alone would be sufficient to inspire such agitation, though another of the gardeners with whom he had spoken had suggested that the Squire was very peculiar at times. He had not expected to be sent on such a quest immediately he returned from so long a voyage, but he was not sorry the orchid was to be put into the background for a time. He had traced the species to its native haunts, and he had discovered that the only name it merited was the name by which it was known locally. That name was "*The Orchid of Death*"

He made no comment, therefore, beyond: "Very good, sir!" Then he went to fetch his gun.

It was not until towards evening that he found any signs of the raven. He had searched the woodland by the lake, and had gradually made a reconnaissance of the numerous copses in the park, finishing again at the lake. It was then that he first felt the presence of a weird shadow flitting through the trees, which were just there too dense for him to see distinctly. He followed the shadow until he suddenly

staggered against a tree for support, his blood curdling in his veins. From some little distance ahead of him there came the sounds of hideous, mocking laughter!

For a moment or two he hesitated, hardly caring to proceed. There was something unnatural in the sound of that laughter. But he knew the Squire would not let him rest until he was sure the raven had been killed, and he had a score himself to settle with Haggerty. So he summoned his courage and pushed forward to the spot from which the laughter had come. Still farther ahead of him, as if luring him on, the mocking laughter came again. He staggered forward blindly, though trembling with the chill in his blood, for there was no doubt in his mind now that the bird was the one which had belonged to Haggerty. His superstitious fear increased as he heard the flapping of wings on the water, and the shrill cries of the waterfowl as they hurriedly deserted that spot on the lake shore to which he was approaching. Beyond that, an unearthly stillness seemed to pervade the wood.

He did not know what to expect as he pushed on. He had heard rumors at the time of Mrs. Parkinson's death that Haggerty had said she would be seen again. Following the laughter of the bird, he wondered what he would find by the water . . . what had caused the waterfowl to desert that spot so abruptly. He had made no perceptible noise himself, for he had proceeded cautiously. It was not yet dark, and the waterfowl were almost tame.

As soon as he could see the water through the trees, his first thought was that he was merely seeing what he expected

to see. But the spectacle caused him to stop dead, paralyzed with fear. With her back towards him, peering into the water, was Haggerty!

Was it Haggerty . . . or an apparition? It was one of the two, for his eyes would not deceive him to such an extent. And there was no mistaking the stoop of her shoulders . . . the quaint costume she had always worn. For a moment or two again he stood petrified, not knowing what to do. Then he half raised his gun to his shoulder, but let it fall to his side again. If the creature before him were of flesh and blood, to shoot her would be murder, though she was worse than a murderess herself. There was the other possibility, which had greater appeal to his thoughts. If what he saw was something ethereal, to shoot it would be impossible!

He made up his mind what to do as he reasoned vaguely in this manner. She had not observed his approach. Perhaps he could withdraw without attracting her attention. He turned to do so, stepping cautiously through the bushes and trees. He scarcely moved a dozen paces. From behind him this time, with a raucous intensity that made his heart leap into his mouth, came again the piercing cry of the raven.

He tried to run, but his legs failed him. Again there came the mocking laughter of the raven, and this time he turned, determined to fire at Haggerty no matter what the consequences. She was still there . . . but looking at him. Even then, with the flickering light playing on her features, he could not be certain if she were human or an apparition. And even as he leveled his gun to take aim at her, she stretched out her hand towards him, and his finger froze to

the trigger. His whole arm became as if paralyzed, and the gun dropped from his hand, and hung suspended in a bush by his side.

Tremblingly, he waited for her to speak, but no sound came from her. Had she spoken, courage might have come to him to complete what he had thought to do. So he argued with himself. But her silence finished the conviction that she was not a being of this world, though it was not until she had turned her back upon him, and peered once more into the water, that he felt the blood beginning to circulate again in his veins.

Then he fled, leaving the gun where it was, unconscious of how the strength to move came into his legs. Not once did he look behind, nor did he stop running until he was well out of the wood, for the cries of the raven followed his footsteps. Long before he reached the house, he had made up his mind that Moatlands Park was not a healthy spot in which to remain.

He was not only frightened out of his wits by the apparition of Haggerty, but there was also that orchid. So far as his journey to India was concerned, he had obtained the desired information, but that was of such a nature as to make his journey wasted. He was positive that the conditions under which he had found the orchid growing could never be duplicated at Moatlands Park, and if they were he did not want to be in on the cultivation. Now his fear of Haggerty's ghost was a perfectly good excuse for leaving. That was the point he raised with the Squire immediately he was admitted to him, and Parkinson, who had no care now for

the orchid, accepted it as a plausible excuse. In fact, by the time Wilson had finished telling the story of the apparition by the lake shore, Parkinson was in no condition to offer remonstrance of any kind.

"All right, Wilson," he said feebly. "I can understand why you want to go. I want to make one request, however. Don't say anything to the other servants about your seeing Haggerty."

"Haggerty's ghost, sir," Wilson corrected him. "We all know that she is dead and buried."

"And I know that she has come to life again," the Squire glowered at him. "I have seen her myself, though I demand your silence."

"And you shall have it, sir," Wilson replied trembling. Undoubtedly the Squire was insane, but that was no concern of his. He considered he was getting away easily. Yet he hazarded the question: "What, sir, do you wish me to do with the information I got about Mr. Shadakhari's orchid?"

"Give it to Sir Philip some time . . . when he is master here," Parkinson answered. "He may perhaps cultivate it. I never shall."

"And I hope he doesn't," Wilson found courage to say. "There is something wrong with that *Coelogynina*. Haggerty may be mixed up with it."

"Haggerty? How?"

Wilson told him how the orchid was named, and briefly explained why. Parkinson was shaken with the suggestion, but he managed to assume a certain amount of dignity as he ridiculed the idea of its connection with Haggerty. "The

man who gave me the orchid is a prince of India," he said. "That fiend of hell could have no possible connection with him."

Nevertheless, after Wilson had left him, his terror of Haggerty made him wonder. There was that strange remembrance of her words to himself at the moment when the orchid came into his possession. Perhaps, if he went to look at it . . .

He was puzzled when he discovered it was not where he had left it. Wilson must have moved it, he thought afterwards. Anyway, it didn't matter. Wilson could tell Sir Philip where it was when he wanted it. Again he thought there might be nothing in what Wilson had said. He was scared . . . and no wonder . . . at seeing Haggerty. But he thought he would write a warning note to Sir Philip.

He went back to the library with that purpose in mind. He wrote a note, sealed it in an envelope, and placed it in one of the drawers in his *escritoire*. Then he forgot all about it, for the harassing problem of Haggerty's return and his own approaching doom absorbed all his thoughts.

He sat huddled in a chair, trying, with what few connected thoughts he could muster, to conjecture what other calamity Haggerty's appearance to Wilson foreboded. She would not show herself thus openly, even though immune from human interference, without being prepared to strike. Perhaps he had been wrong in compelling Wilson to silence.

When he moved from one chair to another, his tottering legs almost threw him on to the floor, for since the previous night every terror that he had tried to stifle had been re-

awakened in him, playing havoc not only with his mind, but undermining his physical strength as well. She was the judge who had doomed him to die, and, when the time came, she would also be his executioner. If only he knew what means she would adopt! All he was sure of was that it would be something as insidious and irresistible as the means by which she had compassed the deaths of both Mildred and Marie. Even as he sat there, he felt she was killing him by inches.


He thought of the "Landry's paralysis" of which Crawford had spoken . . . of the symptoms that Crawford had first observed when he looked at Mildred, before elucidating the problem of the melting icon. He thought of those strange attacks of paralysis which had stricken him whenever Haggerty had revealed herself to him, and he wondered if that was the manner in which she would finally strike him. That was the thing of which he was afraid . . . to be helpless while she worked her merciless will. And he was surely afraid, he admitted to himself. Crawford had been right there. Fear was adding its weight to the slow torture that was killing him by degrees. But Crawford had been wrong in that greatest particular of all . . . that that fear could be resisted! It was surely killing him. Heavens, it was maddening to wait uncertain for the end like this! He felt . . . he knew . . . that his brain would soon become far too unhinged for him even to collect such scattered thoughts . . . tangible thoughts . . . if he did not take some action. Yet action at the moment seemed impossible. What could he do, and where could he turn to escape from his appalling fate?

Peters disturbed him from the lethargy into which he had sunk when his thoughts became almost too incoherent to be uttered aloud to himself . . . Peters, with the question as to whether he would have his dinner served to him there in the library. He wanted no dinner. He hastened the valet out of the room with an expletive such as the man was becoming accustomed to, with the added injunction not to go near him again. Afterwards—after a lapse of perhaps an hour—he was not certain if it was Peters who had disturbed him again, or if it was the distant cry of the raven which he could then hear.

Wilson had followed the raven, and had seen Haggerty. Where the raven was, she also was. Perhaps that was the object of that call now . . . to lure him to where he himself would see her more substantially in the flesh. Well, he would go to her, for he again felt the need of action, and it would be better to get it over quickly.

He rose unsteadily from his chair, and stumbled, hatless, through the fernery and out on to the broadlands of the park towards the lake from which direction he could hear the cries of the raven more distinctly now. It was dark outside. but soon the moon would emerge from behind the clouds. He did not require any light, however, for he knew every step of the way. It was a good thing it was dark, he thought, for that would prevent anyone from following him, and being the witness of his encounter with that creature he believed had risen from the dead to torment him. He would go straight to the spot where Wilson had described that he had seen her.

When he reached the lake, everything was silent, except for an occasional gentle splashing on the water. Looking thitherwards, he saw, close in to the shore, one of the giant carp struggling in its death throes to submerge itself once more below the surface. He watched its movements as it came gradually nearer and nearer to the shore, fascinated by its contortions, until it managed to sink some little distance beneath the surface. He watched its movements when it rose again . . . leaned over it to watch it again submerge, until its shape became distorted by the depth of water that was there, or by the tiny ripples that were on the surface. The moon was shining clearly on the water by that time, and he could follow the motions of the fish distinctly.



Gradually, beneath the water, he saw it turn, and in the distortion he thought its features assumed a startling resemblance to his own. *Or it might have been that it was in a direct line with his own reflection, and that reflection had caused the phenomenon.* Whatever it was, there throbbed strangely through his brain some mutterings which Haggerty had uttered at one time when, half unconscious, he had seen her. Strange that he should remember them now. "Pisces was the constellation of your birth, and Pisces shall see your end!"

Pisces . . . a fish! So he recollected laboring through his first Latin translations at the local Grammar School before he passed on to Public School and University. He laughed puerilely at the remembrance. Then the insane laughter died on his lips. Pisces . . . a fish! What a funny name to give a constellation! And how absurd to recall such

a thing now, and be repeating it as if committing it to memory anew. It was one of the rudimentary things he could never forget, and yet it persisted in drumming through his brain.

Pisces . . a fish! Pisces . . a fish!

He looked for the carp again, but it had sunk out of sight, though he still saw his own reflection. He tottered on the edge of the water as he thought that here might be the solution of Haggerty's mystery. The melting icon which had caused his wife's death, so Crawford had said, had been fashioned in her likeness. And the fish was dying . . and so was he!

But where was Haggerty? He was sure he would see her first. He turned to look for her, and imagined he saw her form among the shadows of the trees. But the hallucination, or whatever it was, had disappeared before he had taken two feeble strides, and he turned again to look at the carp, the spasmodic splashing of which told him it had risen again to the surface.

He laughed again as he regarded the dying struggles of the fish. It was strange that it should be expiring at the same time as he. Then the same fear came again to him as he thought that perhaps the agony which had been depicted on Mildred's face would come to him, and he seized a stick and tried to reach the carp to push it out of sight. He was arrested at that by a voice behind him, so close that it might have been immediately behind his ear.

"Fool!" the voice said. "If you kill it you will only hasten your own end, for you can only live until it has ceased to breathe."

He swung round as quickly as he could. This time Haggerty was there, standing not ten paces from him, the raven perched on her shoulder, an evil light of triumph glittering in her eyes.

Beside her, he saw Wilson's gun lying in the bushes. He would have stepped towards it, but she held him arrested by her outstretched finger. All he could do was to exclaim, and that not above a hoarse whisper: "Fiend of hell! Mistress of the devil! Tell me, obscene spirit . . . are you wraith or flesh and blood?"

"I have come back in the flesh," she said, cackling in hideous mirth, "for I was never dead. It was enough for your servant to think I was a wraith, for it is my purpose still to be thought dead. But you may know the truth, for your lips will never speak it. See behind you the instrument of my vengeance. Your life I have bound up with it, just as I ensnared that of your wife in the melting image. In a few minutes it will die, and so will you!"

By the time she had finished speaking, he had scarcely strength enough left to support himself against a tree. His eyes had become dimmed, and she appeared to him again as she had appeared beside his bed . . . a spectral, ethereal shape.

"Pisces," came from that shape, "I tell you again, was the constellation of your birth, and Pisces shall see your end!"

Behind him he could hear the splashings of the carp growing more and more feeble, while the throbbing of his

own heart grew weaker and weaker in coincidence with the sounds.

With the last flicker of life, as he sank to the ground, he heard the raven fly off into the obscurity of the night, awakening the echoes with its awful cries!

At the Manor the servants also heard the sounds, and Peters, filled with a superstitious fear, started to look for his master. Finding him nowhere in the house, he headed a search party of the terrified men-servants. It was several hours before they found their master, and, when they did find him, upon his body, moving slightly in the gentle breeze that had risen, was a raven's feather!

PART TWO

CHAPTER XVIII

VYVYAN MEETS EVELYN PARKINSON

THE spacious salons of Lady Disston's town residence in Lancaster Gate were thronged with guests. Her ladyship's ball being held two weeks after the third Court of the season, it was to be expected that among the guests would be numbered many of the latest debutantes. Such was the case, and Evelyn Parkinson was among them. That was sixteen years after the death of her father, Richard Parkinson, Squire of Moatlands Park.

Most of the guests had already arrived. Lady Molly Attonbury, niece of Lady Disston, and Mrs. Malcolm Tulloch, Lady Disston's daughter, had assisted in their reception. There were others, however, who were still expected, and one of these latter was the subject of a brief raillery between the ladies during a momentary lull in the proclamation of names by the majordomo of the establishment. The belated arrival was Dr. Eustace Vyvyan, who still retained the practice in Harley Street relinquished to him by Dr. Crawford before Crawford's departure for India and Thibet.

Those who, like Lady Molly, would have made a social lion of Dr. Vyvyan had failed ingloriously. He was still

an eligible bachelor, though already on the seamy side of forty. But he abhorred social functions, and had moreover the excuse of his profession to account for his non-observance of social obligations not directly connected with it. He was so wedded to that profession that he preferred to spend his time among the mental deficient of the London hospitals, where that time would not be so irretrievably wasted, according to his own opinion.

Lady Disston had reason to believe that he would make an exception in her favor. She represented an important essential to Dr. Vyvyan's practice—a practice which had grown in extent, though perhaps not in commensurate emolument, since Crawford had left it to him. Lady Disston was one of the few wealthy patients of his who felt it necessary to pay her physician regularly, and she was meticulous about that because she knew that by being so she was indirectly making it possible for him to give gratuitous service where shillings assumed abnormal importance, and pennies were as precious as the widow's mite. And there was still a closer bond between them than that. In spite of his own social independence, Lady Disston regarded herself as a kind of foster mother to him. She had more or less adopted him when his own mother, a close friend of her ladyship's, had died, he attending University at the time.

Lady Molly was wont to ridicule this intimacy of relationship. Just now she had laid a wager with Lady Disston that Dr. Vyvyan would not come. Lady Disston had been sufficiently satisfied that he would as to lead her to accept the wager, a matter of no great importance to either

of them: Now she was beginning to feel that perhaps her niece was right after all, though, in response to Lady Molly's teasing, with her own daughter's assistance, she said pleasantly: "My dear Molly, I am perfectly willing to double the wager, and also give you odds if you like."

"Agreed, on even terms," Lady Molly laughed.

"What is this rash threat of expenditure I hear?" a pleasant voice drawled behind them. Lord Atlonbury had approached them unobserved. "A husband is not responsible for his wife's wagers. I hope you remember that, Molly. Besides, I did not think to bring a check book with me."

"You won't need it, Teddy," Lady Molly smiled at him. "Your money is perfectly safe."

"He would willingly pay for our discomfiture if he could see mother crow over us," Mrs. Tulloch interposed.

"I am at least intrigued to ask what it's all about," Lord Atlonbury said.

"It's Dr. Vyvyan," his wife replied. "I have wagered against Aunt Maude that he won't come tonight."

Lord Atlonbury turned to Lady Disston.

"My dearly beloved Aunt-in-law," . . . so he frequently addressed her . . . "if you would be counseled by me, you would lavish your affection on someone more prone to appreciate it."

"Mother is too old to change her favorites," Mrs. Tulloch said banteringly. "Besides, you know she would have one of her terrific nerve attacks if she were disappointed."

"And she feels safe in knowing that would fetch him," Lady Molly added.

"I shall be disappointed only on one score," Lady Disston

said quickly. "Eustace will come if he can. I want him to meet Evelyn Parkinson."

"Does he know that?" Lord Atlonbury asked her, in a tone which suggested that, if Vyvyan knew, she might as well give her wager up for lost.

"I want him to meet her professionally," Lady Disston said, instead of answering the question.

"Vyvyan would scent such an intrigue a mile away," Lord Atlonbury commented drily.

"I have already given Eustace up as a matrimonial prospect," Lady Disston responded to that.

Lady Molly said: "I am not so sure."

"Of course, I should like to see him settled," her aunt replied. "Evelyn is a charming girl, and needs all our sympathy. But I am not certain I should like to see Eustace so directly connected with Moatlands Park as that."

"Why? You think . . . ?"

The question Lord Atlonbury would have expressed was interrupted by the stentorian tones of the majordomo.

"Dr. Eustace Vyvyan!"

"You win, Auntie," Lady Molly said, with a wry grimace. "I'll pay up tomorrow."

"Don't bother, dear," her aunt replied, as Vyvyan approached. "It was all in fun, Molly."

"Do I arrive in time to hear the tail end of a good joke?" Vyvyan asked, bowing over his hostess's hand.

"We'll leave mother to tell it," Mrs. Tulloch said, drawing the Atlonburys away with her.

"Take care of Miss Parkinson for me," her mother said.

"I'll commandeer her program, and hide it in my pocket," Lord Atlonbury laughed, with a significant glance directed towards Vyvyan. The specialist was looking at Lady Disston, so the thrust lost its significance for him.

"I feel I am really a successful hostess tonight, Eustace," Lady Disston was saying to him. "You cannot realize what that means to me."

"I should imagine success was assured from the moment you took the matter in hand," Vyvyan replied, glancing towards those of the brilliant assembly whom he could see.

"My dear boy, knowing that you are too prosaic to be capable of flattery, I can accept that compliment at its face value," Lady Disston smiled, well pleased with the remark, nevertheless. "But that was not exactly what I meant."

"No?" he queried.

"Didn't your ears burn when you heard my remark to Molly just now?" she asked him.

"No. Why should they? Was I the subject . . . ?"

"I had a wager with Molly about you. You don't mind?"

"Rather, I am interested," Vyvyan said.

"Then I'll tell you about it," Lady Disston went on. "This afternoon Molly was so confident that you would not come tonight, that it was she who laid the wager in the first place. I was equally confident you would come, so . . ."

"You took her on, of course."

"Naturally. I knew you would favour me. When Molly pays up, you may use the money in one of your charitable causes."

"Then I am glad you won," Vyvyan smiled. He added: "I didn't know Lady Molly was so interested in my doings. She cannot be accused of being interested in her own behalf. She is happily married, and her daughter is hardly old enough . . ."

"While I am too old to be accused of intriguing for myself, and I have no marriageable daughter," Lady Disston replied. "It delights me to be able to discuss the matter without the restraining urge that silenced some of the ladies at Lady Molly's tea. Mark you, dear boy, if I had another daughter, you would not escape so easily."

"It is you who would flatter, and raise my ambitions with pictures of the impossible," he said, amused at her, and wondering what was behind it all.

"You should feel flattered that I am willing to share your devotion with a wife," she told him, tapping his arm playfully with her fan. "I am not afraid I shall have to do that, though you know I would do anything to find a suitable wife for you. You need a wife, my dear Eustace; yet I know wild horses would not drag you face to face with even golden opportunities."

"Might I ask what particular glitter you have to dazzle my eyes with now?" Vyvyan smiled.

"That is not my ulterior motive at the present moment," Lady Disston answered seriously. "Evelyn Parkinson . . ."

"I heard you mention her to Lord Attonbury," Vyvyan said. "I observed that she was named recently as a debutante."

"I want to talk to you about her," Lady Disston said, "and I want you to talk to her. Not as you are concluding, however," she added. "Under different circumstances I might have hoped that she would make an appeal to you where others have failed. You haven't seen her since she grew up?"

"No."

"She is perfectly lovely . . . easily the most beautiful deb at the last Court. Immensely wealthy, too. It is no wonder she has already acquired a great train of suitors. She can never shake off such men as the Earl of Boughton, the Honourable Edward Bellingham-Smith, Gerald Cranston, and quite a few others."

"Is Miss Parkinson here tonight?" Vyvyan asked, vaguely trying to see through her ladyship's somewhat contradictory statements. Glancing round, with an almost imperceptible tilt of his head, he hardly needed Lady Disston's answer in the affirmative. He saw the three men she had named, whom he knew quite well, paying court to the loveliest girl he had ever seen.

"Yes. That is she," Lady Disston was saying. "Have I exaggerated?"

Vyvyan had not seen Evelyn Parkinson since she was a child. That was during the inquest on her father. Dr. Matthews had sent for him. The coroner had returned a verdict of death from natural causes, for it was generally known that Richard Parkinson was greatly debilitated through worry, with a mental condition bordering upon insanity. In accordance with Crawford's request before he



left for India, Vyvyan had written him as full particulars as he could. Crawford had not received the letter until several months afterwards, and his reply had not carried with it any enlightenment as to the probable cause of death. It is doubtful if Crawford had seen in it any mystery at all. His belief in spiritual influence had in no way changed, unless it had been augmented by his further researches, and mention of Parkinson's insanity answered the one question that might have risen in his mind . . . whether Parkinson had had strength enough of will to resist such an influence.

Once before Vyvyan had written to him something pertaining to Moatlands Park. That was three months after Crawford had sailed, and the intelligence he sent was that the girl whose mental condition Crawford was studying had suddenly disappeared, and that no trace could be discovered of her whereabouts. Indeed, nothing had been heard of Miranda since that time.

Evidently Miss Parkinson's eyes had been resting on Lady Disston and himself, and Vyvyan found it difficult to withdraw his own as they met them. Lady Disston had described her as beautiful. He, unimpressionable skeptic though he was about the charms of women, had to admit that the description took on a beggarly tone when applied to her. She was more than beautiful. An exotic flower, nurtured under conditions that would accentuate its marvelous symmetry and gorgeous coloring, might be called beautiful, but the pristine loveliness of Evelyn Parkinson transcended the wonderful beauty of such a flower. Yet in the wistful expression of her eyes, even at that distance, he fancied he

could see some trace of memory of those terrible events which had left her an orphan, although they had occurred before she was old enough to realize what they meant.

Thinking of that, he turned suddenly to Lady Disston and asked: "Why did you wish me to speak to her?"

"I am worried about her," Lady Disston told him. "She is not happy, as a girl blossoming into perfect womanhood should be. Before tonight, I have only spoken to her twice since she came home from school on the Continent, but I am sure of what I say. She did not take me into her confidence, and I could not very well ask questions, but, from the way she spoke, I believe she is troubled about her uncle, Sir Philip."

"Sir Philip is not here tonight?"

"He is a worse recluse than you are, my dear boy, with considerably less excuse. But . . . you remember the peculiar circumstances under which his brother, Evelyn's father, died. I have heard rumors about Sir Philip that have made me wonder if Richard Parkinson was not really insane."

"Morbidly . . . there was every evidence to prove that he was."

"Yet there was never any insanity in the family before."

"That is quite possible. But, from what Crawford told me, corroborated by Dr. Matthews, such an obsession as Richard Parkinson had about that gypsy, Haggerty, would be enough to unhinge any man's mind . . . just in the one direction, morbidity. Dr. Matthews told me he lived in mortal terror of some fate she had in store for him, even though she was dead. That gives the key, I think . . . of

course I do not agree with Crawford's odd theories . . to his insanity. To my mind, it was purely a delusion, exaggerated by morbid thoughts. Crawford believed he could have thrown it off, and there I agree with him. Indeed, I should have hesitated to pronounce him insane as the coroner did."

"I am glad you think that way, Eustace, for Evelyn's sake," Lady Disston replied, relieved. But she added, again doubtingly: "Could not the same delusion be affecting Sir Philip?"

"How do you mean?" Vyvyan asked.

"I have heard rumours that his mental condition is not quite normal," her ladyship answered. "Evelyn is worried about him, too . . you understand, this shutting himself away as a recluse. Richard did that, too, you know, before he died."

"I can't very well intrude," Vyvyan replied. "I have never met Sir Philip. He was not present at the inquest on his brother. To relieve your anxiety for his niece, however, I would make an excuse for visiting him."

"That was why I was so anxious for you to come to-night," Lady Disston said. "With a little discretion it might perhaps be arranged through Evelyn. I couldn't very well suggest that she make a professional visit to you at Harley Street, for that would have seemed like inviting a greater confidence than she was prepared to give. I will take you over to make you acquainted. I have let you monopolize rather much of my time . . or rather, I have monopolized

too much of yours, but everyone appears too much engrossed in themselves to have observed that. Do the best you can."

Vyvyan was apparently the last guest to arrive, so Lady Disston felt able to relinquish her post for a moment, to permit him to pilot her across the salon towards the group of which Miss Parkinson was the central figure. Vyvyan approached that group with greater confidence than would have been the case had he thought her ladyship had contrived that meeting with any other purpose. Evelyn Parkinson, apart from that attraction which had seized him from the moment he intercepted her eyes, now represented a possibly interesting case.

The circle of admirers surrounding Miss Parkinson gave way before their hostess and her companion, of whom they stood somewhat in awe as the most prominent mental and nerve specialist in fashionable circles. As Lady Disston performed the introduction they withdrew temporarily, with the intention of coming back, however, as soon as the coast was clear. Their reason for withdrawing was embodied in a remark made to Miss Parkinson by the young Earl of Boughton. He had hesitated long enough to hear Lady Disston say: "I would like to present Dr. Eustace Vyvyan, Miss Parkinson. He is an old and valued friend of mine . . . wonderfully clever, therefore very difficult."

What the Earl of Boughton said was: "He is infinitely too clever for us, Miss Parkinson. He would dissect our feeble brains without any compunction. So take care!"

Vyvyan stooped low over Miss Parkinson's hand to conceal the shade of annoyance that passed over his face at this

remark. He considered it a vulgar form of witticism. When he lifted his head up, however, he was smiling.

"I am afraid I shall have to try to eradicate a bad impression, Miss Parkinson," he said.

"You should not find that very difficult, Dr. Vyvyan," Evelyn said easily. "It must be wonderful to be famous. I feel we hardly need an introduction, for I remember when you picked me up in your arms as a little girl, and I thought I recognized you when you were speaking with Lady Diss-ton."

Just then Lord Attonbury came back with an apology. He had carried out what he threatened to do literally.

"I must beg you to excuse my absent-mindedness, Miss Parkinson," he said, handing her her dance program. "I . . . don't know how I came to put it in my pocket."

"I saw you do it," Evelyn smiled. "Perhaps I thought its being in your pocket might save me some temporary embarrassment. I hope your absent-mindedness has not prevented you from writing your name on it."

"I looked to see that I had done that before I brought it back," Lord Attonbury replied, withdrawing casually.

Vyvyan was beginning to marvel at her composure. It was strange also for him to feel a momentary sensation of relief at her words, for he wondered if her possible embarrassment would have any connection with Lord Boughton, or the Honourable Edward Bellingham-Smith. Of embarrassment she showed none, and, incidentally he was glad, though with no logical reason, that the gentlemen named had not disturbed her perfect equanimity.

"May I be permitted to take possession of your program for a little while?" he asked her.

Miss Parkinson ceded it willingly. Glancing at it, Vyvyan saw that there were quite a few dances still open, and suspected, in spite of Lady Disston's ingenuous manner, that Lord Attonbury's absent-mindedness had been prompted by her for his own benefit. Such things had happened before. The concealed orchestra struck into the strains of the opening waltz as he observed that that dance was not taken.

"And may I have this waltz?" he asked then.

"I shall be delighted," she answered.

"I did not hope to be so fortunate as to have the privilege of the first dance," he said.

"I expect everyone has a special partner selected by formality for this," she smiled. "Doubtless they all thought I should have someone equally privileged, instead of being a poor little, isolated unit, with no one with me except a chaperon."

"Then I am going to be bold enough to ask if I may monopolize all the dances that would naturally go to a privileged partner," Vyvyan said. "May I? I also am more or less an isolated unit."

"You may," she answered, adding: "I know you only ask it out of mere courtesy, because everyone knows that Dr. Vyvyan is impervious to feminine attraction. Lady Disston told me that when you were mentioned, and I know she is very fond of you. Yet I was hoping you would ask me, for I want to have a talk with you. It is more or less professionally, so you must be sure to send your bill."

"I have already been amply repaid for any service I can render," he assured her earnestly, surprised at his own earnestness in making such a statement.

She went on: "Lacking an opportunity any other way, I should have come to see you. I hope you will not think it a serious breach of etiquette to mention family matters here, about which I would rather talk to you as a friend than as a physician."

Lady Disston had said that Miss Parkinson waltzed divinely, and by this time Vyvyan knew that the compliment was no exaggeration. And again he wondered at her marvelous composure, for her words smote him with a strange foreboding of further disaster at Moatlands Park. Evidently there was ground for the anxiety expressed by Lady Disston. And that was proved by Miss Parkinson's next words.

"Treat me as a friend," he had said, "and I shall esteem your confidence an honour."

To which she had replied: "Somehow, I have always thought of you as a friend. My uncle has spoken of you in such a way."

"But I have never met him," Vyvyan exclaimed.

"I should not care for him to know that I had mentioned anything to you," she continued, apparently unconscious of anything to be surprised at in what she had previously said. "But I am dreadfully worried about him, Dr. Vyvyan. He is altogether different now to what he was before I went to Switzerland to school. I can only attribute it to the fact that he is aware of some shadow haunting him as haunted my father before he died. You know sufficient of the un-

happy history of my family 'to know something of what that was."

Vyvyan stifled an exclamation under his breath. This, then . . . knowledge of more than he thought she should have been told . . . accounted for the wistful expression he had observed in her eyes. Yet, as she continued speaking, he could do no more than exonerate her informant from blame. As Mistress of Moatlands Park, it would have been more culpable to keep her in ignorance of the danger which might threaten her.

"Dr. Matthews has mentioned you, too," she went on. "He has not told me very much. I have learned more from another source, which perhaps I will explain to you later, not now. He is terribly worried about Sir Philip. He would have sent for you to see him and pass your opinion, but he dare not. My uncle, when he mentioned it once, was so strongly opposed to it that he had to drop the subject. Dr. Matthews did tell me that my father acted in the same way until it was too late for anyone to help. I am only following his advice in getting into touch with you in this informal manner. He thought perhaps you might be able to send for a certain Dr. Crawford. Can you?"

"I certainly will," Vyvyan said. "But he is away in India, may be absolutely out of immediate reach somewhere in Thibet. I have only the address of his club in Delhi. I will write to him there, but it will be weeks before he can arrive. Under the circumstances, don't you think I can presume upon this slight acquaintance with you, and make an impromptu call at Moatlands Park?"

"I was wishing you would suggest that," Evelyn answered gratefully. "I know your interest is impartial. To obtain your opinion I am willing to smile at anything people may say."

Vyvyan felt not so sure now of the impartiality. Evelyn continued: "I shall tell Sir Philip I have met you, and that you asked if you might call."

"When would it be most convenient?" he asked her.

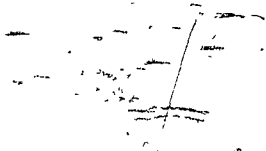
"Some day next week, perhaps. I am staying in town over the week end."

The music ceased then, and he took her to where Mrs. Tulloch had joined Mrs. Pulverton, Evelyn's chaperon.

He danced several times with her that evening, but the subject they had discussed before was not mentioned again. They conversed on mundane topics as they moved to the rhythm of the music, and Vyvyan discovered that she was highly intellectual as well as surpassingly beautiful. Glimpsing them occasionally, Lady Disston was well satisfied with the success of her plan for bringing them together, in spite of what she had said to the contrary. Vyvyan's face betrayed the fact that he was not too preoccupied with the tragedy of his partner's life to be keenly conscious of the stirring of his pulses which proximity to Evelyn Parkinson awakened. He was aware of a clinging fragrance which had not been in his life before when, the privilege of handing her into her carriage later falling to him, the gentle, warm pressure of her hand in response to his caused a delicious . . . an exquisite . . . sensation to pervade his whole being.

"I anticipate the pleasure of seeing you again," he said, as he bent his lips to her fingers.

"I shall be 'at home' on Wednesday," Evelyn replied, smiling at him. "Thank you so much for being interested," she added, just loud enough for him to hear. Then louder, "I know Sir Philip will be pleased to see you."



CHAPTER XIX

"THE ORCHID OF DEATH"

CRAWFORD had his headquarters in Delhi, and Vyvyan, before he retired for the night, wrote a long letter to him. That done, he still sat in his study, thinking matters over.

In the first place, a brief analysis of his own impressions brought very little satisfaction. He could not deny that he had been very much attracted to Evelyn Parkinson; but, in his own mind, there were two main obstacles against permitting such impressions to develop. Evelyn Parkinson had not yet quite come of age, while he was already on the far side of forty. The disparity between their ages, however, was the lesser of the two considerations. It has already been observed that his practice, from the point of view of his accounts receivable, was a lucrative one. But, compared with the large fortune to which she was heiress, his income, present or potential, was too insignificant to amount to anything, and he strongly abhorred the stigma of being a fortune hunter in the matrimonial market. Not only that, but he had always persuaded himself that he was a confirmed bachelor—at least until he could retire and still support a wife in comparative luxury, and it was absurd to allow

the impressions of a moment to derange his perfectly settled convictions.

From that angle he managed to persuade himself that the interest aroused by purely masculine impulse was secondary to the professional interest which he felt in the Parkinson family, that interest having been relegated to him by his retiring partner in case any emergency should arise, with Crawford himself too far away to give any effectual assistance. Such a contingency having arisen, he felt convinced that professional interest had won . . . an interest which had merely engendered the other as something subsidiary from the time he had first glanced across Lady Disston's salon, and his eyes had met those of Miss Parkinson. But he finally went to sleep and dreamed that he was dissecting the Earl of Boughton's brains, and that the dissecting of them was providing him with great satisfaction.

When he called at Moatlands Park the following Wednesday, he discovered a fact which was at first disconcerting, but which he afterwards regarded for a brief while as an avenue of escape from what might have been an embarrassing situation. Wednesday was Miss Parkinson's regular 'at home', and he found a number of callers already at Moatlands Park when he arrived. Even at that he at once found a source of consolation. That arose from the evident fact that Evelyn's invitation had not been thrown open to embrace the Earl of Boughton, Bellingham-Smith, or any of their boon companions.

The party, consisting principally of ladies, were having tea on one of the lawns by the Western Court when he was

announced. Lady Disston was present, with her daughter. Lady Molly was not there. Lady Disston flashed him a glance of encouragement and approval, and for the benefit of those present took upon herself the responsibility of his being there at all.

"Dr. Vyvyan will think this is a conspiracy, and that I am determined he shall never escape from my clutches," she said, beaming upon the assembly as if demanding corroboration of her statement.

"I have so rarely an opportunity of meeting your ladyship unprofessionally that this is really a charming pleasure," Vyvyan returned, replying to the banter, and bowing to the various groups at the same time.

"Mother would have us believe that Dr. Vyvyan did not expect to see her here, and that, as a particular friend, she has to submit to his idiosyncrasies," Mrs. Tulloch observed, fencing to Lady Disston's humour. "Everyone knows that poor Dr. Vyvyan has less freedom than if he had a wife."

"My dear!" her mother expostulated.

"I wonder which is the greater benefit, to be a particular friend, or the happy recipient of such an unc customary call," Miss Parkinson laughed. "Dr. Vyvyan at least arrives in time for a cup of tea."

"But not in time for us to risk our complexions by demanding his services as tea bearer to ourselves," Mrs. Townmarsh said.

"In that case you may sit by me, Dr. Vyvyan," Evelyn said, making room for him on the bench beside herself. "And you are not to tell me you have called to see Sir Philip

until you have eaten at least two pieces of cake, with I don't know what risks to your digestion."

He sat down as she directed, and accepted the proffered cup of tea, pleased to observe that she had thrown off her despondency of the night of the reception. They all chatted inconsequently for a time while he consumed the stipulated pieces of cake, thrilled anew by the charm of Evelyn's personality, and taking delight in the easy grace with which she performed the duties of hostess, and the delicate tact with which she kept the conversation general.

Sir Philip did not appear, and, when the ladies rose to take their departure, Vyvyan commenced to offer tentatively his excuses also, but Miss Parkinson restrained him.

"If you are in no hurry, Dr. Vyvyan, I know Sir Philip would be pleased to see you," she said. "I told him you might call this afternoon."

"Then I will certainly stay," he replied, catching a glance of approval from Lady Disston, who commandeered his arm as he walked with the ladies to where their automobiles were waiting.

"I am glad Evelyn would not let you escape so easily," she said to him. "She is still worried about her uncle."

"I thought she appeared a lot brighter today," he said.

"She has wonderful composure, my dear boy . . . the traditional backbone of the Parkinsons before Richard defaulted. Don't you think she presented a charming picture? I think she is delightful. She will make a splendid wife for someone."

"Meaning me, I take it," he laughed.

"I didn't say so," she retorted.

"Not in so many words," he retaliated. "But I caught a roguish look of machination in your eyes, and . . ."

"My subterfuge was feeble against your keen penetration," she interrupted him.

"You place me in a dilemma there," he told her.

"How?"

"To give myself any credit at all, I must of necessity belittle your skill at intrigue."

"You are incorrigible," she laughed with him. "You should really be grateful to me for getting rid of the crowd before the admirable Mrs. Pulverton returned from the house."

"I recognized your skilful generalship," he said.

"While you are cross with me for interfering so much," she added.

"Not at all," he replied. "I merely sympathized with the amount of energy you have expended on my behalf."

"If you fail me this time, I shall wash my hands of you altogether," she returned.

When they had departed, Vyvyan wandered back to the Western Court with Evelyn.

"We had better go this way in case Mrs. Pulverton comes to look for me," she said, adding earnestly: "I am grateful to you for coming, Dr. Vyvyan. I was afraid I was imposing too much on your generosity."

"Rather you extended to me a privilege which I was delighted to accept," he replied, with equal earnestness.

"And you submitted to Mrs. Tulloch's badinage so gal-

lantly that I felt really culpable and ashamed for dragging you into it."

"Please don't distress yourself about that," Vyvyan said quickly. "Popularity with Lady Disston, whose large-heartedness covers a multitude of petty trifles, entails a certain amount of badinage from which one cannot easily escape. Believe me, I am more amused than otherwise at being dubbed the favorite of London's society leader. It is the only diversion I allow myself."

"Does that mean that we shall never see you again?" Evelyn asked.

"Indeed, no," he answered, with more feeling than he intended. "I think Lady Disston is right in one respect. I have been sticking too closely to work. This afternoon has had quite a tonic effect upon me."

"I am glad of that. Even a nerve specialist has nerves, you know."

"Besides other failings that are human," he smiled. "Your own spirits, Miss Parkinson, are so much brighter this afternoon that they could not fail to be contagious."

"Was I such an intolerable bore at Lady Disston's?" she queried.

"On the contrary," he said. "I hope you did not think I meant that. Considering what you told me, I thought you were bearing up with remarkable fortitude. I trust the cloud was only imaginary, and that it has all blown away."

"That cloud will never disperse," she said, valiantly checking a shudder. "I am getting accustomed to it, that's

all. Sometimes it lifts a little, and permits me a glimpse of "

She hesitated, and a trace of that wistfulness he had observed came again into her eyes.

"Catch hold of those glimpses of happiness and hang on to them," Vyvyan hastened to advise. "Perhaps I should not have referred to what you told me, but I had hoped to convince you that it might only be a cloud. All clouds can be dispersed by the sun."

"This is different, and it had to be mentioned," Evelyn replied. "Besides, you have already done much to break up the cloud . . more perhaps than anyone else could have done. My confiding in you helped me immensely."

"I am delighted to hear it," he said. "I hope Sir Philip is better, too."

"He has appeared brighter than he was before I spoke to you at Lady Disston's. Then I thought it was entirely because of the shadow which hangs over our lives. I have had reason to believe that my uncle's mind was becoming . . unhinged."

"That is surely an illusion," Vyvyan said quickly.

"I wish I could think so," she returned. "I am taking you into my full confidence, and I want you to be perfectly candid with me, no matter if you hurt me."

"Ask me anything you like, and I will answer to the best of my knowledge," he replied gravely.

"Then tell me," she said, "is it true that my father was insane when he died?"

Her question was disconcerting, but he answered it more readily than he had answered the same question from Lady Disston. She already knew too much for it to avail anything to attempt to keep her in the dark. He said: "You spoke of the cloud that is hanging over you, Miss Parkinson. Myself. . . and I repeat what Dr. Crawford told me . . . I believe that it is in a great measure imaginary. Your father allowed it to become an obsession, however, and a thing like that will momentarily cause a form of morbidity which has parallel symptoms with mental aberration. Apart from worrying over something which death had made non-existent, Mr. Parkinson was perfectly normal. At the time of his death, he was holding important public offices, and . . . "

"But you admit it is possible for an obsession to derange one's mind, even if only temporarily," she interrupted him.

"Is it something like that you are fearing for Sir Philip?" he asked, considering it futile to try to fence longer.

"It is," she answered.

"Sir Philip is worried by the same cause?"

"No, it is not that."

"Then, my dear Miss Parkinson, what is it?" he demanded, mystified.

"It is something entirely different to my father's worry, but it is an obsession just the same," Evelyn told him. "Let me explain. Before my father died, there were certain orchid problems that monopolized all the time he could give to them. So far as I know, they caused him no particular worry. But my uncle is different to him in one respect. His worry is with one unique specimen. All his energy is de-

voted to it, and it appears to be a matter of life and death to him. I know he has spent thousands of pounds on it, constructing apparatus for its artificial nourishment, and so on. He can hardly leave it long enough to take time to eat. My observation tells me that orchid is driving him insane."

Vyvyan knew nothing of Richard Parkinson's wager with Shadakhari, but he knew of Sir Philip's enthusiasm. He met her statement as if it were quite logical.

"I suppose, then, he is worrying from fear that it will not be a success," he remarked.

"There is every chance of its being a success," she surprised him by replying.

"Then why take such a pessimistic view of his absorption in it?" he demanded. "If that is all Sir Philip's worry, it won't last very long. With his success a reaction is bound to occur."

"If he can retain his reason until that success is achieved," she argued. "Visions of success do not seem to have effected any improvement in his condition, however. I want you to tell me quite frankly, Dr. Vyvyan . . if he should not succeed, could failure cause a permanent derangement of his mind?"

He told her he did not think Sir Philip was the type of man to let a failure like that prey for long upon his mind . . that, his disappointment once over, he would soon forget about it in his absorption in other specimens. He was hardly prepared for her next question.

"You don't think there is any inherent power in orchids to make it possible for them to drive people insane?"

"What makes you ask such a strange question?" he asked her.

"Because they always inspire me with a feeling . . . yes, I admit it . . . almost of revulsion," Evelyn answered. "I cannot explain it. Normally, I am passionately fond of flowers, and beyond a doubt orchids are among the most beautiful. Yet as long as I can remember they have made me shudder to look at them . . . the sort of feeling I should expect to experience if I trod suddenly on a venomous snake. I know it is absurd, but I cannot conquer it. There has been a kind of estrangement gradually growing between Sir Philip and myself, and I have thought it was because he observed my aversion whenever the orchid he lives for was mentioned, although I tried not to let him see it. The reason that I questioned my uncle's, and my father's, sanity, was that I am afraid that orchids would drive me insane if I were compelled always to live among them."

Vyvyan looked into her eyes seriously for quite a minute before he spoke. In all his experience he had never encountered quite the parallel of this obsession. But he could discern nothing in the clear depths of her eyes to warrant the last suspicion of subnormality. He said: "It is a strange revulsion to have, Miss Parkinson. For some reason or other orchids may not attract you, but that is something you should smother rather than encourage."

"That may sound simple to you," she objected. "I have tried it without success."

"Then Sir Philip cannot be aware of how you feel about

them," Vyvyan contended, "or he would surely not impose them upon you in your own establishment."

"As I say, I have tried to conceal my dislike. It is almost two months before I become absolute mistress here. Sir Philip has stated his determination to leave here then, and . . . with the orchids . . . I have not felt I could ask him to stay. The orchids are all his, but it is my opinion that he is anxious to perfect this specimen before he risks its abortion by removal. And I should not like to suggest to Sir Philip that he remove the orchids now, and take the risk of what failure with the *Coelogynina* would mean. I would rather die, I think, than have anything happen which might bring insanity on him."

It seemed useless to attempt to get her beyond that point, so he asked: "Is Sir Philip in the orchid house now, do you think?"

"Most probably," she said. "Let us go into the house, and I will send for Peters. He will take you to him. You will pardon any informality so far as Sir Philip is concerned?"

"Assuredly."

Evelyn sent the servant who opened the door to them in search of Peters, and the latter took Vyvyan to the library. Peters was growing old in the Parkinson service, and therefore felt himself privileged to speak plainly.

"I don't think Sir Philip is expecting callers, sir," he said. "But if you will remain here for a moment I will tell him you are here. He is in the fernery."

"I think he expects me," Vyvyan replied. "Tell him it

is quite an informal visit, and that he is not to disturb himself in any way."

"You understand, sir, he is very busy with a special orchid, and doesn't like to be disturbed," Peters continued apologetically, as if anxious to make excuses in advance for any brusqueness his master might exhibit.

"That's all right, Peters," Vyvyan said. "Just tell him I am here."

"Pardon me, sir. I'll tell him at once."

He disappeared through the door connecting with the fernery. Very soon Sir Philip stood in that doorway. He was in his shirt sleeves, and it was evidently one of his good days, for he was smiling.

"Glad to see you, Dr. Vyvyan," he said cordially. "Evelyn said you might call, but she was not certain, so you must excuse my working appearance. Would you mind coming into the fernery, so that we can talk without disturbing what I am doing."

There was nothing in either his appearance or his remarks that was not rational. During the brief delay between his conversation with Miss Parkinson and that moment, in spite of the encouragement he had given her, Vyvyan had been distinctly puzzled by what she had said, while the valet's remarks had shown that fear of Sir Philip's sanity was shared also by the servants. Miss Parkinson looked rational . . . had spoken rationally, except when mentioning her dislike . . . her fear . . . of orchids. That fear of hers was more disturbing than Sir Philip's enthusiasm . . . fear a more frequent cause of dementation than the other. Yet

it struck him instantly that neither of them was in the least degree insane, and subsequent conversation with Sir Philip further convinced him.

He followed him into the fernery, to where the special orchid was being cultivated. Beneath and around it was apparatus which suggested an elaborate chemical experiment rather than an experiment in advanced horticulture. Sir Philip referred to it as an experiment when he explained what he was doing.

"You would hardly credit it, Dr. Vyvyan," he said, "but I am working my head off in order to win a paltry wager of a thousand guineas." And he went on to explain the circumstances of his brother's wager with Shadakhari.

"My brother left the cultivation of this particular orchid to me as a special legacy for the honor of the house," he continued. "Unfortunately, he died before he was able to do anything with it himself. When he spoke to me about it some time before he died, he was under the impression that it was moribund. I thought so too when I examined it. I had a job to find it when I took over control here, and thought at first he had thrown it out. Only the fact that he had not changed a codicil in his will concerning it made me determine he had not. Strange to say, when I did find it, it showed every promise of renewed life. You know, there is something peculiar about orchids. They seem to have a natural antipathy against certain persons. What I mean is, an individual specimen may refuse to respond to the touch of one master, and yet respond with alacrity when touched by another."

"That is not the first I have heard of the sensitiveness of plants," Vyvyan told him.

"This one needed more than the touch of a sympathetic hand," Sir Philip smiled. "Even with the encouragement I received at first, it looked for a long time as if I could not coax it farther. Had Wilson been here . . . he was head gardener in my brother's time . . . I should have been successful with it sooner. Richard sent Wilson to India to obtain knowledge of the natural habits of the flower. Apparently they had a disagreement when Wilson returned, and he left. I got hold of him a couple of years ago, and, though I could not persuade him to come back and help me with it, he had retained a great deal of valuable information which he passed on to me."

"I am not surprised, Sir Philip, that, after all the expense your brother had incurred, you should be interested in winning even a thousand guineas," Vyvyan observed.

"More especially as, until I cultivate it, I cannot give it a name," Sir Philip returned.

"No?" Vyvyan queried.

"Of course, the species is readily ascertainable . . . would have been even if Richard had not told me it was a *Coelogyne*," Sir Philip went on. "The fact that it is epiphytal, a monocotyledon, would be sufficient for that. The funny part of it is, Wilson was able to learn no name for it but its cognomen."

"And that is?"

"The 'Orchid of Death'."

Vyvyan wondered if Miss Parkinson knew as much about it as that, and if the fact accounted in part for her repugnance. Sir Philip went on: "A peculiar name, isn't it? Certain amount of truth in it, too, so far as the natives know it. But the name only applies to the gases it absorbs in the foetid swamps of the Hoogli jungle, which cause one to risk one's life in trying to obtain one of the plants."

"Gases?" Vyvyan queried vaguely.

"Yes. Most of this complicated apparatus is intended to get rid of unabsorbed gases rather than their actual production. Producing them is of course what I am doing. I am sure that Shadakhari, when he made the wager, thought that the idea of those gases.. the composition of them.. would never be discovered. He forgot he was dealing with a Parkinson. Wilson had found one of the plants blooming in rather a peculiar way. He was led to it at dusk one evening by a curious exudation of gases something like the *ignis fatuus*. He was nearly asphyxiated, for, as I told you, the gases are deadly poisonous.

"I obtained as much information about them as I could from him. After that it was merely a matter of experimentation to get the right composition. When I discovered the correct nitrogenous carbo-hydrate, I started manufacturing it, with the result that the plant made rapid strides. That bracket supporting the excrescent roots is really a perforated tubing. I have a special absorber to take up unused gases, and you will observe the special ventilation system I have installed. The temperature I am obliged to maintain causes them to rise to a certain extent, but I have taken the pre-

caution of converting them before their heavy gravity can cause them to descend again to the danger of anyone."

"You never feel any ill effects from the gases yourself?" Vyvyan asked him. Sir Philip's explanation had been amazing to him, but the whole thing was but an illustration of the doggedness and perseverance . . . "backbone", Lady Diss-ton had described it . . . of the Parkinsons, and Sir Philip's remarks seemed perfectly logical. And there was no denying the success he was achieving with the plant.

"Not often," Sir Philip answered. "Just occasionally I get a whiff of them, but I renew the absorber at once. That is why I stay here most of the time. When I have succeeded in winning the wager, I shall not renew the experiment, but intend to destroy the whole system I have constructed around it. I guess the plant will die without it. A few weeks now should see the finish, and I won't exactly be sorry."

So far, all he had said threw light on what Miss Parkinson had told Vyvyan. Also what he added.

"By that time Evelyn will be of age, and I want to leave her sole mistress of her own establishment. This will be the last great orchid achievement of Moatlands Park, for I don't think Evelyn cares very much about them."

Vyvyan wondered momentarily if that was as far as his knowledge of Evelyn's aversion went. Even at that, it was a strange relation for her and Sir Philip to hold, each knowing something of the other's prejudices, and Vyvyan felt relieved at Sir Philip's decision.

He refused an invitation to stay to dinner. He had no wish to enter into a discussion with both present which might

compromise him with either of them, and there was nothing to be gained by that. He saw Miss Parkinson for a brief while before he left, and gave her all the assurances he could, perfectly convinced that the reports concerning Sir Philip's sanity were all wrong.

But he wrote to Crawford again that night, telling him all that Sir Philip had said about the orchid. There was a chance that both his letters would reach Crawford at the same time. As a matter of fact, they did.



CHAPTER XX

THE REAL SHADAKHARI CORROBORATES CRAWFORD'S FEARS

CRAWFORD was contemplating returning to England, for the first time since he had left that country, when Vyvyan's letters reached him. As it happened, he had remained in Delhi with but one object, to attend the State Ball at the Viceregal Palace. He read the letters without being very much perturbed by the information they contained. The state of Richard Parkinson's mind at the time of his death had been communicated to him by Vyvyan, and he had not been surprised. It was only what he had expected if Richard Parkinson did not follow his advice and throw off the obsessing fear of influence from the dead Haggerty. That Sir Philip should be tainted with the same form of madness was a little more surprising, but it merely led Crawford to conclude that there must have been some hitherto undiscovered form of insanity in the Parkinson line.

That thought . . of hereditary insanity . . was emphasized by what Vyvyan said about Evelyn Parkinson and her strange aversion to orchids. Or rather, that aversion did not appear so strange to Crawford as it had done to Vyvyan. He knew of occultists who had investigated what was appar-


ently animosity to certain flowers and plants. As a matter of fact, he was aware that with some persons the choicest flowers may produce a form of mental poisoning akin to the physical poisoning when certain fruits are eaten by some . . . fruits highly nutritious to others. Farther remote than that, too, there is that functional enmity which has produced the dominant virility of such poisonous plants as the belladonna, the white and purple bryony . . . the active struggle between plant and animal life, two forms of existence evolved from similar organisms of protoplasm, as in the cases of the nepenthes and cephalotus of South America, and a few other carnivorous plants. Sir Philip Parkinson's enthusiasm over the special orchid of the wager was nothing unusual. Knowing the conditions of that wager, he could understand the enthusiasm. The name of the *Coelogynina* . . . "The Orchid of Death" . . . he accredited to a superstitious source. Growing under the conditions that Sir Philip had described to Vyvyan, the name was probably more natural than the plant's biological one. No wonder Shadakhari had been so confident that it could not be domesticated.

One thing, however, the mention of the orchid did bring to Crawford's mind, and that was a message from Richard Parkinson which he had never had an opportunity to deliver to Tumahl Shadakhari. That opportunity was now available. Shadakhari was listed in the "Gazette" as one of the aides-de-camp to the Viceroy. He would seek occasion to be presented to him.

He was among the early arrivals at the Viceregal Palace, but the vast salons were already resplendent with the full

dress uniforms of officers of the different regiments of the garrison, the gorgeous robes of the ladies, and the bedecked and bejeweled attire of one or two lesser Hindoo Princes, with here and there the somber hue of civilian evening dress to form a contrast.

Crawford had received his summons through a friend of his, Major-General Sir William O'Brien. He was conversing with the General and Lady O'Brien when the chief functionary of the Palace announced: "His Highness Raj Tumahl Shadakhari, Maharajah of Chalawur!"



Crawford turned to General O'Brien, remarking: "I wonder if it would be possible to have speech for a moment with Raj Shadakhari. I had a message to deliver to him from a mutual acquaintance, now dead some years, and there is a sequence to the message which I am sure the Prince would be pleased to hear."

"You are fortunate there, my dear Crawford, although it may not be possible to arrange it here," the General replied. "Shadakhari is one of the principal aides to the Viceroy. I know him well however. He and I were in the same hunting party for two weeks a couple of years ago. We were hunting man-eaters in Nepal. Some other time, I am sure . . ."

"I am leaving Delhi in a day or so," Crawford said. "I hate to put you about, and, of course, if it isn't possible, I quite understand. But I am afraid, if I do not speak with him tonight, my message may have to remain undelivered."

"Wait a minute or two, and I will see what I can do," General O'Brien returned. "The Viceroy has not yet arrived. I may be able to arrange it."

Some others joining their group shortly afterwards, Sir William made suitable apologies, and, leaving Lady O'Brien with them, he and Crawford threaded their way across the lobby, and through a number of salons to the anteroom connected with the Throne Chamber, where presentations would later be made. The crowd was not so dense there, and the General soon descried the man they were seeking.

Raj Tumahl saw their approach, and came forward to meet them. After a brief, cordial interchange of compliments with him, General O'Brien remarked: "I should like to present to Your Highness a very great friend of mine who is anxious for the honour. Dr. Crawford is a man of science, and is keenly interested in our racial fraternity."

Shadakhari bowed to Crawford with oriental elaboration.

"The pleasure is mutual, my dear General O'Brien," he said. "I have heard of Dr. Crawford through friends of mine who are interested in the same branch of science as he. If I can be of service to Dr. Crawford I shall be delighted."

Crawford acknowledged his goodwill fittingly, and said: "It is not so much a service that I would request of Your Highness as the fact that for a number of years I have been the bearer of a personal message which until now I have had no opportunity to present. Your Highness will remember Mr. Richard Parkinson, of Moatlands Manor, in the English County of Hertfordshire."

Shadakhari raised his brows questioningly, as if trying to recall the name. Then he said: "I am afraid you have me at a disadvantage, Dr. Crawford. The name Parkinson, however, seems somewhat familiar. Sir Philip Parkinson was in the English Diplomatic Service, was he not?"

It was hardly the statement Crawford expected him to make. It was inconceivable that, having made the wager, and deposited the money, the Prince should have dismissed the matter entirely from his mind as a matter of no further importance. Crawford answered rather haltingly: "That is so, Your Highness. Richard Parkinson was his brother."

"I am afraid I have not the honour of his acquaintance," Shadakhari repeated, with the same puzzled expression.

"The message for Your Highness from Richard Parkinson was with regard to an orchid . . ." Crawford endeavoured to recall the circumstances to him . . . "a wager of a thousand guineas that it could not be cultivated in England, made at the Horticultural Exhibition in Brighton some seventeen years ago. It is possible Your Highness has forgotten the details."

To Crawford's increased amazement Shadakhari replied: "There is a mistake. I have not been in England since I was a student at Oxford nearly thirty years ago. At the same time, I should like to hear the conditions of this wager. It seems I have been unconsciously implicated, or you would not have come to me. What was the name of the person who made the wager with your friend?"

"His name corresponds with Your Highness's . . . Tumahl Shadakhari," Crawford told him. "He was a man of Your

Highness's country, and of apparent opulence. Knowing something of Hindoo customs, I did not conceive it possible that another could bear the same name. I can only offer my apology . . . "

"I cannot permit you to make an apology, Dr. Crawford," the Prince said. "The mistake was not yours. I cannot appropriate the message for myself, but it has at least given me the pleasure of making your acquaintance. There is no other Tumahl Shadakhari. I alone have the privilege of bearing that name. The person to whom you refer was an impostor, and he must have known that I am an enthusiastic orchid-grower myself."

Before Crawford could speak he added: "Needless to say, whether the orchid in question has been cultivated or not, I shall fulfill the obligation into which I have unwittingly been drawn. My honour demands it, first; the discovery of the impostor afterwards."

Crawford had great difficulty in curbing his impatience. There was no doubt in his mind that Shadakhari was speaking the truth. He could have no object in denying the wager if he had made it. Vyvyan's letters had not perturbed Crawford, but now those letters appeared to him in a different light. The idea of an impostor, Miss Parkinson's antipathy, Sir Philip's extreme enthusiasm . . . the suggestion of renewed insanity where it had been unsuspected before . . . all seemed to point to another devilish machination of Haggerty's. Crawford did not change his belief in the fact that she was dead, but his belief in her possible spiritualistic influence increased perceptibly. He connected such an influence with

the actions of the maid whose traces had been lost; it had not occurred to him before that another posthumous agent, acting under the same influence, might have been responsible for the presentation of the orchid to Richard Parkinson. He began to realize his folly is not remembering the manner in which the functional affinities and antagonisms between plant and locomotive existence had been employed by sorcerers of past ages, they using otherwise innocent plants as the basis of their necromancy. The only fact by which he could condone his indifference to the orchid of the wager was the fact that there had been no circumstance to arouse his suspicions. If his present suspicions, fostered by Shadakhari's suggestion of an impostor, were correct, he would probably be too late to undo the result of his indifference. He had great difficulty in controlling his voice to give the Hindoo Prince the assurance: "Your Highness can eliminate from your mind the actual conditions of the wager. The amount covering it was deposited with the London and Counties Bank at the time the wager was made. As for the orchid itself, I am beginning to see the handiwork of an implacable enemy of the Parkinson family. I would I could assist Your Highness in tracing the impostor."

"You have aroused my curiosity," Shadakhari said quickly. "Shall I be imposing too much on your generosity if I ask you for further particulars?"

"I will give you what few particulars I can," Crawford answered, feeling that the Maharajah of Chalawur was entitled to so much consideration. "This orchid . . . I do not profess to be a botanist of any moment, so know very little

about it in that respect . . . presumes to be a species of *Coelogygina*. Within the confines of Your Highness's own realm, I am given to understand that it has a name which is very appropriate."

"And that is?"

" 'The Orchid of Death' ."

Shadakhari started. "The whole problem is becoming more intricate," he said. "I know the species to which you refer, and myself would have wagered that it could not be cultivated away from its native jungle. It has been tried."

"By today's mail I have received information that the plant is progressing towards perfection," Crawford told him. "Sir Philip Parkinson . . ."

"Richard Parkinson abandoned the attempt, then?"

"He died shortly after I left for India. Sir Philip has carried on his experiments with the orchid as a sort of legacy from his brother. Unfortunately, he is succeeding with it."

"Unfortunately?" Shadakhari queried. "You would refer again to the enemy of whom you spoke? You think the usurper of my name has aided his success for some reason?"

Crawford was glad of the opportune arrival of the Viceroy, which made it impossible for him to answer the questions.

Major-General O'Brien had engaged in conversation with some of the members of Raj Tumahl's suite, so had heard very little of Crawford's talk with the Maharajah—barely enough to arouse his curiosity. They went back to rejoin Lady O'Brien's group. After that the evening passed

238 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

on leaden wings for Crawford. It required a great deal of effort to meet people, and exchange compliments and commonplaces while his mind was freshly absorbed with Haggerty's malevolence, and with Richard Parkinson's words: "When Haggerty strikes, it will be too late for you to do anything!"

He realized now how truly prophetic those words were. Whether Haggerty was instrumental in Richard Parkinson's death or not, there was no longer any doubt of her connection with the orchid. The foisting of the orchid upon Richard Parkinson by a brilliant faker, the wager to stimulate the enthusiasm of both Richard and Sir Philip . . the whole thing as subtle as the introduction of the melting icon into the Manor . . everything suggested Haggerty as the most evil genius who had outlived the centuries.



CHAPTER XXI

THE THIRD FEATHER

CRAWFORD cabled Vyvyan from Bombay: "Sailing Steamship Armenia. Cable Suez Date Orchid Blooming."

Vyvyan telephoned the Steamship Company's offices, ascertained the date of the Armenia's arrival at Suez, and then went to Moatlands Park to endeavour to get the required information. This was the third time he had visited there, and he found no change in either Sir Philip's or Miss Parkinson's condition. He saw the orchid again, and, from its progress, easily credited Sir Philip's statement concerning when it would flower. He left, as on the other occasions, increasingly impressed by Evelyn's beauty and the freshness of her charm. He admitted to himself that he was rapidly falling in love with her.

The next day he received an unexpected visit from Dr. Matthews.

"Miss Parkinson told me you have visited Moatlands Park, Dr. Vyvyan, so I feel I can introduce my errand without any preamble," Matthews said.

"Yes, I have called three times . . . unprofessionally, of course."

"I understand that. I am glad you did, as Sir Philip refused absolutely to allow me to consult you as an alienist. I have come now with Miss Parkinson's sanction to ask if you can possibly get in touch with Dr. Crawford."

"I was at Moatlands Park yesterday," Vyvyan told him. "Has anything developed since then?"

"I hardly understand what you mean by 'developed'," Dr. Matthews said. "Surely you have observed his condition."

"I have seen nothing to indicate a condition at all," Vyvyan replied. "otherwise I should have notified you. Apart from his obsession with that orchid, Sir Philip has appeared perfectly normal."

"Then he must have exercised greater self-control than when I have been with him," Matthews said, surprised.

"Tell me how you find him," Vyvyan urged.

"He is nervous, irritable . . . even profane. His eyes glare wildly. Sometimes a look of fear comes into them. He talks to that orchid as if it were a human being."

"Go on," Vyvyan said.

"You were surprised when I gave my opinion that Richard Parkinson was insane when he died. He exhibited the same symptoms frequently, right from the time Evelyn was born. With him there was a reason for it, or he thought there was. His obsession was a fear that Haggerty had set her curse on the House of Parkinson, and that sooner or later she would get him. Candidly, I believe she did. The raven's feather would substantiate that. It was her symbol. That belief has been forced upon me against my previous con-

victions. I am equally certain that she, through that orchid, is operating now in some obscure way. She swore she would kill every member of the family."

"Was that the reason for Crawford's haste?" Vyvyan wondered. Matthews continued: "You possibly do not believe in witchcraft any more than I did, Dr. Vyvyan, yet but for Dr. Crawford's proof of it my own professional position would have been seriously jeopardized. It is by his own request that I ask you to try to get in touch with him."

"He is already on his way here," Vyvyan said. "I had a cable from him yesterday. I wrote him particulars concerning the orchid. Apparently he attaches the same importance to it. I am to cable him at Suez, and I am glad you came. Let me know everything that happens."

"When is the most convenient time to telephone you?" Matthews asked him.

"Between one and two in the afternoon, or after ten in the evening," Vyvyan answered. "Any time during the night," he added.

Vyvyan sent an urgent cable to Suez. There, Crawford transferred to the Government dispatch carrier which picked up service mail from the 'Armenia' to transport it to Brindisi for the overland route.

In the meantime, Dr. Matthews had kept in constant touch with Vyvyan, though he had nothing additional to report. Vyvyan also had been again to Moatlands Park, but had not succeeded in seeing Sir Philip. When Crawford's wire came from Dover, he called Dr. Matthews.

"Get me here after 10.30 tonight," he said. "You can then speak to Dr. Crawford."

An hour before the train was due, Dr. Matthews called from Moatlands Park. "I won't stop to talk to Dr. Crawford when he comes," he said. "Bring him straight here." He added: "Things couldn't be much worse than they are now."

Vyvyan met Crawford at Charing Cross. Without any preliminaries, he gave him Matthews's message. "I've only brought an emergency kit," he said. "I didn't know what else . . ."

"I've got all I want," Crawford interrupted him. "I had an idea we might need to hurry."

A few minutes later they were breaking the speed limit along the Finchley Road.

On the way Vyvyan could do no more than enlarge upon what he had written. He expected Crawford to enlighten him concerning his own suspicions, but Crawford did not know what to expect until he had seen the orchid.

Dr. Matthews met them in the hall. "Whom will you see first, Sir Philip or Miss Parkinson?" he asked, shaking Crawford's hand absent-mindedly.

"Miss Parkinson?" Vyvyan exclaimed.

"If anything, her condition is worse than Sir Philip's" Mathews said. "Her symptoms resemble those of the maid when Mrs. Parkinson was murdered, under some form of hypnosis, except that she is often seized with violent convulsions."

"When did this start?" Crawford asked him.

"Soon after I telephoned Dr. Vyvyan. She was all right then apparently, though she refused to see me." Matthews added as an afterthought: "It's just a week tomorrow that her mother . . ."

"What's that?" Crawford exclaimed.

"It's Miss Parkinson's birthday tomorrow . . her eighteenth birthday," Matthews said.

"Good God!" Crawford seemed to lose his composure. "The time limit set by Haggerty!"

"Please explain!" Vyvyan entreated, his face white and tense.

"There isn't time," Crawford disappointed him. "I must see Sir Philip and the orchid without delay."

"But Miss Parkinson . . . ?"

"Matthews," Crawford turned to the family physician. "will you go back to Miss Parkinson, and let us know immediately if any change occurs?"

Before they reached the library their footsteps were halted. From a distant part of the mansion there reverberated a weird, unearthly scream. It was followed by another, and yet another.

Crawford hesitated. Vyvyan touched his arm. "Please!" he said. Crawford took one look at his drawn face, and ceded, "Come on then!"

They took the staircase at a run. At the end of the gallery above they saw Miss Parkinson's maid coming for them. She beckoned and turned. They overtook her at the door of her mistress's suite.

Vyvyan was staggered as they passed into the bedroom beyond. Evelyn's beautiful face was distorted like that of a creature in excruciating pain. She sat upright in bed, her fingers wildly repelling something he could not see. The nurse Dr. Matthews had summoned earlier was vainly striving to quiet the frantic gestures. Crawford said sharply: "Don't use force! You may aggravate the condition." He asked Dr. Matthews: "How long do those paroxysms last?"

"Perhaps five or ten minutes. Each one gets longer."

As Vyvyan watched, horrified, he wondered if Crawford might not be right with regard to the powerful spirit telepathy of which he had spoken, and with which he connected the death of this beloved girl's mother. Hitherto he had not had much sympathy with his friend's strange researches, to which his harassed mind was now to find a foundation. Crawford turned to him. "Have a hypodermic syringe ready, Vyvyan," he said.

By the time he looked up from obtaining it, another change had begun to take place. To his immense relief the tension of Evelyn's facial muscles softened and relaxed. Soon her sightless eyes closed, and with a sob of spent energy she sank back upon her pillows. Handing the syringe to Crawford, he asked him what he proposed to inject.

"The prescription of a Philippine savage, used to counteract the influence of a witch doctor," Crawford answered, taking a small case of drugs from his pocket. "It's perfectly all right, so don't look alarmed, old man. It should relieve her brain of some of the congestion, and permit me

to acquire a certain amount of hypnotic influence. If so, we may yet be able to save her."

"Then you know what is happening?" Vyvyan asked anxiously.

"I have an idea. The main thing is to combat that influence."

He had measured a minute quantity of one of the drugs, and now injected it into Miss Parkinson's arm. Vyvyan watched while he gently massaged Evelyn's eyelids, lifting them occasionally, and concentrating upon her the full force of his hypnotic power. Vyvyan went closer as Evelyn's eyes finally opened of themselves, and gazed into his before they closed again. In that brief instant of time he was glad to see a light of recognition flicker in them, while her bosom ceased to heave as her brain responded to Crawford's suggestions of sleep.

In a little while Crawford gave some instruction to Dr. Matthews, and he and Vyvyan proceeded to the library. Peters admitted them, for Dr. Matthews had told him they were coming. Sir Philip jumped up from his chair as they entered, but sat down again as he recognized Vyvyan.

Sir Philip's appearance was another shock. There was evidence now of the absence of mental balance of which both Evelyn and Dr. Matthews had spoken. He had commenced rocking himself to and fro, mumbling half audibly. Then he started again as he gasped: "Brandy, Peters! Damn you, give me some brandy!"

Crawford handed another phial to Vyvyan. "Two

drops of this in the brandy," he whispered hurriedly. "I'll engage his attention."

He crossed the room to Sir Philip. "My name is Crawford, Sir Philip," he introduced himself. "Your brother..."

A momentary light of intelligence came into Sir Philip's eyes as he repeated the name. "Crawford? Thank heaven you have come! A fiend of hell is let loose in this house. I have seen her!"

"Where?" Crawford questioned.

Sir Philip did not answer. He was again glaring wildly into the corners of the library, as if expecting to see Haggerty materialize again, and babbling incoherently.

"It's Mother Haggerty he means, sir," Peters volunteered in a whisper. "He keeps saying he has seen her. If I wasn't sure she was roasting in hell..."

"Give me that brandy, Peters, damn you!" Sir Philip had struggled again into coherence.

Vyvyan handed the glass to Peters, who in turn gave it to his master. Sir Philip swallowed it at a single draught. Vyvyan glanced at Crawford questioningly as the drug took effect almost immediately.

"It lasts but a short time," Crawford assured him. "I can arouse him any time I want to. Let's get a look at that orchid."

Vyvyan led the way into the fernery. The moon, high in the heavens, shed a radiance almost as bright as day into the building, and directly upon the orchid which, gorgeous in its magnificent splendour, had grown considerably since he had seen it last.

Crawford drew Vyvyan's attention to something of far greater moment than the size of the flower. The wiry stem was practically transparent, and a thin red line was gradually, but perceptibly, viscously permeating the stem towards the flower.

"It might almost be blood," Vyvyan suggested.

"I believe it is."

"Good heavens! What do you suspect?"

"If what I suspect is correct," Crawford answered, "it explains Sir Philip's present mental state, and the force that is compelling Miss Parkinson towards the flower. What we witnessed upstairs was doubtless her splendid resistance. In the jungle, it may merit its name of 'Orchid of Death' through external causes; here, with its artificial nourishment, poison may have been introduced on to the stamens, and . . ."

"Why not destroy the accursed thing?" Vyvyan interrupted.

"Miss Parkinson's life may be too closely bound up with it for that. I believe our only hope is to keep it alive, and keep her away from it."

"Will your injection do that?"

"It may, if the effect lasts long enough. I am afraid to use any more, and it would be dangerous to attempt to stop her by physical means."

"Your own hypnotic control?" Vyvyan faltered.

"If it were a case of opposing my will against that of a living person I should be more confident of success," Crawford said.

248 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

"What was that Peters said about Sir Philip having seen Haggerty?" Vyvyan asked him.

"Hallucination," Crawford answered.

"Then you believe Haggerty could influence him to that extent from the beyond?" Vyvyan was incredulous.

"I have already seen evidences of it. The girl who was instrumental in Mrs. Parkinson's death . . . who was robbed of her memory . . . was undoubtedly influenced that way. So also must have been the impersonator of Shadakhari."

Vyvyan said nothing. Such things were beyond his comprehension. Fascinated, he was watching the hideous plant. Its wonderful mottled head, the thick, fibrous stem, resembled the head and body of a cobra, rearing towards its prey. Into his mind there came a wild picture of the rods of the magicians of Egypt, which turned into serpents at the will of their owners. Could this flower, in a similar way, be further endowed with vindictive animation?

"God!" he exclaimed, clutching Crawford's arm as the head of the flower made another jerk upward, and the thin red line shot forward another fraction of an inch—two inches already since he had been watching it. "Can't we do anything besides stand here?"

"I wish indeed there were something else we could do." was all Crawford answered.

Another jerk of the plant, another shooting forward of that relentless red line! Again Vyvyan wondered if it were possible for such an influence to emanate from the spirit world. Could there not be such a thing as resurrection from the dead for a creature of hell? Was there not perhaps

truth in the belief of the middle ages that the only way to exterminate a witch was to immolate her? Sir Philip believed she was alive . . .

"If everything remains quiet until that reaches the flower," Crawford disturbed his thought. "There are only a few inches now to go."

A sudden sound . . . an exclamation! Then the noise of a commencing struggle in the library, and Peters's call for assistance.

"Sir Philip!" Crawford ejaculated. "I'll go. You stay here, Vyvyan!"

In the library Peters was struggling with his master, trying to wrench from his grasp a revolver which he had snatched from a drawer in his desk.

In two strides Crawford crossed the room. With a quick twist of the wrist he made Sir Philip drop the weapon. While Sir Philip glowered at him, and cursed him, he said to Peters: "Wait in the hall a minute. I want to speak to Sir Philip alone."

"What madness is this?" he demanded, immediately the door closed behind Peters. "Haven't we enough on our hands without such an insane act?"

Sir Philip continued to struggle until he became limp. The strength of madness had gone from him. The drugged sleep had had a composing effect, at least temporarily. When he spoke his words were rational.

"Can't you see it is the only way?" he queried.

"I see nothing of the kind," Crawford told him. "Your cultivation of the orchid . . ."

"You know what is happening to that?" Sir Philip articulated.

"Something of it . . . the meaning of the blood which has been absorbed by the plant. What I don't know is how it got there."

"I have been tricked," Sir Philip moaned.

"So was your brother tricked when the orchid first came into his possession," Crawford said. "That is the main reason why I am here. The man who made the wager with him was an impostor. I spoke to the real Shadakhari before I left India. He denies all knowledge of it."

"I know that," Sir Philip astonished him. "Haggerty told me so herself."

"Haggerty did?"

"Yes. I know you think she is dead, but I have seen her . . . spoken to her."

Crawford let that pass. He asked him simply: "When?"

"Last night. No, it must have been the night before. Tell me, is there any hope of saving Evelyn from her?"

"There may be . . . if we can count on your assistance."

"If I tell you everything, and you cannot save her, will you give me your word of honour not to interfere . . . not to stop me from . . . ?" His glance had strayed to the revolver on the floor.

"I give you my word of honour," Crawford assured him.

"I will vouch for Dr. Vyvyan too. Do you mind if he hears? I would like to keep a watch on the orchid."

Without a word Sir Philip led the way into the fernery. Crawford kept close to him, to be ready to prevent any

further act of violence. From the expression in his eyes the madness might return at any minute.

"I will tell you everything, though God knows I am not trying to make excuses for myself," he said, when they had joined Vyvyan. "You know, Dr. Vyvyan," he went on, "the means I have used to cultivate this orchid. Until two nights ago it appeared that I should be successful. Then the plant drooped. I thought it would die.

"I was standing where we are now, when I suddenly saw Haggerty standing in front of me. At first I thought it was a ghost . . until she spoke to me.

"I have come back from the grave because I was in torture," she said. "There is no peace even in hell for one who plans to finish a crime left uncompleted. I planned to kill your niece. I have come back to save her."

"I could only stare at her, wondering vaguely what she meant. Then she spoke of the orchid . . told me it was going to die abortively. She told me of the trick imposed upon my brother . . that Evelyn's blood had been introduced into the plant when she was a baby . . that if the plant died before perfection . . before the second sunrise . . Evelyn would die too . . that she, Haggerty, had been influencing me to become the instrument to kill her!

"Gentlemen . . I don't expect . . can't expect . . you to believe me. I don't know why I believed her myself, except that insanity is my only excuse. I asked her what I could do. She told me. To keep the plant alive, and save Evelyn, more of her blood must be introduced into the plant. She said she could use some occult influence to prevent Eve-

lyn from objecting if I didn't say what it was for. She told me how to get it.

"I closed my eyes to shut out the horror of the thought. When I opened them again she was gone, and I saw nothing but the languishing flower. All the evening the horror stayed with me, but at night I crept to Evelyn's room and filled a small tube with blood from her wrist. I fed the roots of the plant with it, and it immediately sprang again into life. I left it . . . to get a drink. My nerves were all quivering over the ghastly business. Somehow, after I drank, my mind became a blank. I remembered vaguely seeing Haggerty. I saw her again, though not so clearly while I was sitting without any lights. She was laughing at me hideously, mockingly. I can hardly credit it myself, but the orchid had passed entirely out of my mind.

"It was not until I awoke just now that I fully remembered, and realized that I had been tricked. Whether Evelyn lived or died, there was only one course open to me. Had you not prevented me, I should have ended my own miserable life."

"Now if your niece lives, you, too, can live honourably, for no one will know what you have told us," Crawford told him quickly. "There is no absolute certainty yet. The damnable scheme has proceeded too far for that."

"There is yet time for me to destroy the accursed thing," Sir Philip exclaimed, seizing upon a stick.

Crawford clutched his arm roughly. "Fool!" he said. "Haggerty told you . . . perhaps the only true thing she said

.. that plant has got to be kept alive until .. see!" he broke off, "there is the first flicker of dawn! Your niece is . . ."

Before he could finish, all their eyes were riveted on the same object. Evelyn Parkinson was slowly entering the fernery, still clothed only in her disarranged nightdress, feeling with her hands as a somnambulist, or one who is blind groping towards the light. Behind her, following Crawford's instructions and not touching her, came Dr. Matthews. Behind him again was Peters.

Vyvyan's heart almost stopped beating. The plant had then all the while, in spite of the science of the witch doctor employed by Crawford, been calling to her with an irresistible fascination . . . calling her to its poisoned petals. Vyvyan had been watching that creeping red line until his faculties were dazed. His ears were drumming, and he scarcely heard Crawford's injunction to stay to watch Sir Philip, as Crawford himself moved towards the approaching group. He hardly heard Sir Philip's hoarse exclamation, "Poison, thank God!", and was not quick enough to stop him as he ran to the flower, and buried his face deep into its petals. His cry of horror froze on his lips as Sir Philip fell backwards, tearing the plant with him. The pallor of death was already on his face as Vyvyan reached him.

Vyvyan turned, nearly insane himself, as he heard Evelyn's strangled sob. He saw her sink into Crawford's arms.

In a few strides he was beside them. He alone should hold her while her life passed out at Haggerty's command. Crawford was glad to relinquish her. He wanted to go to Sir Philip, and he knew more than Vyvyan .. that those

few feeble rays of sunlight which were streaming into the fernery had saved her from Haggerty's vengeance.

Vyvyan took her, and held her pressed closely to himself, incoherent words on his lips. He felt the warmth of her contact, and even then hardly realized that she was saved. With mad desire surging through every vein of his body, he pressed his lips hungrily to hers, receiving with incomprehensible delight her responsive kiss.

Heaven for a moment, and then . . .

Her eyes opened, and looked into his. Passion checked his utterance as he saw the wonder in them; his words were choked by indescribable self-abasement as her expression of wonder changed to one of frozen horror. The reaction was so sudden he would have released her altogether had she not, with another sob, sunk unconscious in his arms!

He was too disconcerted to observe what might have caused her change of expression . . . a raven such as Haggerty's circling over their heads inside the fernery. He did not see Crawford seize a stick, and attempt to overtake the bird before it made its escape by an open window in the roof. Nor did he see the wing feather which fell from it, and zig-zagged downwards with the motion of a falling leaf until it rested on Sir Philip's inanimate body!

CHAPTER XXII

EVELYN SURPRISES VYVYAN

SEVERAL days elapsed before Vyvyan saw Miss Parkinson again. Crawford had succeeded in keeping her name out of the tragic circumstances of Sir Philip's death, and what evidence she might have given at the inquest was not required. Sir Philip's experimentation with the orchid was well known, and the coroner returned a verdict of "accidental death from poisoning". And Miss Parkinson was too ill to see anyone, Dr. Matthews attending her under Crawford's instructions.

Vyvyan was glad of the respite her sickness occasioned. He could not forget the expression on her face when she opened her eyes, with his lips on hers. It eradicated entirely the impression that her responsive kiss had made. Remembering only her look of horror, what hope was there left of a satisfactory explanation?

"As you say, you can at least propose to her," Crawford argued with him. "If she refuses you, you will at least have the satisfaction of knowing you have done everything a gentleman could be called upon to do. Your integrity will be restored, if that is what you are worrying about. Even if she doesn't love you, I think you are deucedly lucky to have had one kiss from a girl like that."

"I was lucky," Vyvyan replied gloomily, "to hold her in my arms for just one moment. To feel her in my arms . . . the touch of her lips! I wanted to crush her, to feel her heart throbbing madly against mine!"

"Yes," Crawford reflected, "when I witnessed the display I thought your case was pretty well determined."

"Didn't you see the look she gave me?" Vyvyan asked him. "I felt like a worm that has been trodden on."

"It would naturally be a shock to her," Crawford sympathized, but adding: "Hang it all, man, there isn't a girl breathing who doesn't feel a little glow when she knows a man loves her sufficiently to grab her at the first opportunity . . . conscious or unconscious! The psychology of proposals such as you read of in books is all wrong. Nine fellows out of ten grab the girl before they utter the orthodox 'I love you!', and make their explanations afterwards . . . their apologies, if necessary."

Vyvyan was quite convinced that it would be a matter of apologies when he received word that Miss Parkinson would like to see him. An hour's run in his car took him to Moatlands Park, but along the country lane which borders the park he slackened his speed, gazing pensively at the home of the girl he loved. The last time he had seen it was during his midnight drive with Crawford. Then it had been bathed in the light of the moon. It was beautiful then; in broad daylight it was superb, the details of its eighteenth century architecture being more pronounced. Everything he saw indicated luxury and opulence, all that life could desire . . . but for the curse of an evil woman.

Passing through the lodge gates, he stopped by the Eastern shore of the lake, and walked through the trees to the edge of the water. Standing near the spot where the body of Richard Parkinson was found, he regarded the peaceful lake and the unemotional movements of the waterfowl. It was impossible to infuse into such tranquillity any idea of the disturbance Haggerty had caused. Yet the thought of possible future happenings made him determine to offer Evelyn his protection if she would not listen to his love.

When she came into the room where he awaited her at the Manor he was struck anew with her beauty, which was enhanced rather than marred by her pallor, and the simplicity of the black gown she wore. The expression of her eyes revealed the suffering she had undergone, otherwise she was calm and self-possessed. Her greeting was one of marked cordiality. His vision absorbing every line of her delicately-carved features, every artery of his body pulsating with the desire to possess her, her words took him by surprise.

"I owe you an apology, Dr. Vyvyan," she said.

He stammered a denial, and would have introduced the object of his visit. She checked him immediately with: "It is not of that I would speak. Naturally we must arrive at explanations later, but first there are other things. My apology is for dragging you into this at all."

"You owe me no apology for that," he replied quickly. "I wish I could make you believe that I always esteemed your confidence an honour."

"I appreciate that, Dr. Vyvyan, but, after today, you must leave me to face the future without your valued help."

"Never, Evelyn!" he exclaimed. "I . . ."

"Wait until you have heard," she interrupted him, a faint color displacing the pallor of her countenance at his use of her name. "I should have told you before that I had seen Haggerty."

"You have seen her?" he stammered, amazed at this new evidence of Haggerty's reincarnation.

"Yes. I saw her a long time before my uncle died, before I first spoke to you. I saw her again three days before my birthday. I don't know what the hour was, but, awakening from sleep, I saw her standing by my bed. She told me of the manner in which both my father and my mother died, sparing me none of the gruesome details. Then she spoke about the orchid . . . of the wager tricked upon my father. She tricked me into believing that it was either my life or my uncle's sanity that was involved. If the flower were brought to perfection, his mind would return to normal. I wanted to save his reason. I didn't mind if I died, for I realized then that my life was under a curse, and death would be a happy release. That was why I imposed upon Sir Philip, letting him think I was asleep. She told me my blood alone could keep the flower alive. Hearing from Peters that the flower was actually drooping, I would have gone to my uncle had he not come to me. Possibly she lied to him, too, so you must not think badly of him. He was not himself."

EVELYN SURPRISES VYVYAN 259

"She tricked him as she tricked you," Vyvyan groaned.

"I thought as much. Perhaps," she added, "you wonder why I have not thanked you for saving my life. I don't think I feel very grateful for that, though I am grateful for your motive."

"It was Crawford who saved your life," Vyvyan said quickly. "You will live to think differently, I hope. Your life is precious to me, Evelyn."

She made an entreating gesture, saying: "I know you would tell me you love me. You would not have kissed me as you did if you did not mean to tell me that. I was hardly conscious when I returned your kiss, but . . I was very wrong."

"Wrong?" he exclaimed. "It was not wrong, if you love me, Evelyn!"

"It was wrong, because I cannot say that I love you," she replied sadly. "I realized more than that in that brief moment. It seems hardly possible that such a thought could come to me in such a short space of time, but I understood that you, even as I, were only a puppet in Haggerty's hands . . two marionettes of which she was holding the strings for some further evil purpose of her own. That was why I looked horrified, because . . . oh, please, don't mention it again!" she broke off, restraining her voice with difficulty.

"But I must mention it," he said, taking her hand in his. "You are wrong in thinking it was born of Haggerty. Sooner or later I should have had to tell you that I love you dearer than life itself . . that I have loved you from the moment I saw you at Lady Disston's."

"Oh, stop . . please stop!" she entreated. "Such a thing cannot be, for your sake. When I said I could not feel grateful to you and Dr. Crawford for saving my life, it was not altogether from a selfish motive. By your saving me, Haggerty has become your enemy as well as mine."

"Won't you say you love me, dear heart?" he pleaded.

"I cannot say that . . oh, please don't ask me that!"

"You cannot say what you would, because that would not be true to yourself," he said fervently, catching hold of hope from her broken sentences, all other consideration such as had troubled him before being cast to the winds now that he was sure she needed him.

"You are mistaken," she said, as calmly as she could. "To be true to myself, I cannot say that I love you. I have valued your friendship, brief though it has been, beyond that of any other person. Now I must deny myself even that. Something terrible would happen to you if I allowed it to continue. For myself, I admit that I live in mortal fear of Haggerty. But I know what to expect, and am ready for it."

There was a tone of resignation in her voice that struck him with an icy chill. There again was that indescribable fear. Crawford was right when he told him what an awful factor that was. Yet Crawford had said . . had reiterated, in fact . . that Richard Parkinson could have conquered that fear . . Sir Philip perhaps . . .

"Together we could conquer that dread," he said. "I know as little about Haggerty's power as you do, but I am sure we could destroy it . . that Crawford is right." He

added: "He is assured that if fear of Haggerty is overcome, neither she nor her influence can do anything. It was the power of his will that kept you away from the orchid, right until the last minute . . . that saved you from her will. And what has been done can be done again."

She sighed. "Overcome our fear?" she questioned. "That is easier said than done. For you it may be possible, but I am a woman. You can only dimly understand the mental torture I have suffered. Heaven knows I need your protection, but I will not impose upon your generosity and allow you to compromise yourself further."

"Then you would compel me to make the biggest sacrifice a man can make . . . the relinquishing of his right to protect the woman he loves," Vyvyan said bitterly.

"Please . . . don't!" she pleaded again, a broken sob in her voice. "I am not ungrateful, but don't say what your generous heart dictates. In time you will forget a love which was the product of such a creature's machinations. It is inconceivable that you could love me of your own accord in so short a time."

"Inconceivable?" he queried. "Evelyn, the greatest wonder to me is that you even value my friendship. I love you madly . . . passionately! I want you more than man ever wanted woman before. I loved you the first moment I saw you. That love has been growing every day since, before any thought of Haggerty ever came into my mind. If she has been instrumental at all, she has given me the greatest blessing that ever came into my life . . . the joy of loving you."

"The blessing will prove a curse if your life is forfeited," she said sadly.

"If your life were forfeited, I should ask nothing else for mine," he returned, and, before she could speak her refusal again, he added: "You say you do not love me. You can still give me the right to protect you."

"I cannot do that without giving encouragement to what can never be," she replied.

"I promise to ask nothing further until I can win your love," he went on.

For a moment she looked at him as if she would read his very soul. Then she said: "I should still have to promise to be your wife."

"That is the only obligation you will be placed under," he assured her. "I shall be willing to await your pleasure for the fulfilling of the contract. And when you are sure that Haggerty's influence is destroyed . . if I cannot win your love in the meantime . . you can, if you wish, repudiate the contract."

"Perhaps you may then find that a Parkinson never repudiates a contract," she replied. Beneath the pride in her voice he fancied he could detect a faint trace of happiness, so he insisted: "Then I have your promise?"

"On your own conditions," she answered.

"I shall pray that, when the time comes, there will be no sense of obligation," he said earnestly. "I want your love, Evelyn, and I shall try to win it."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE NEW MENACE

VYVYAN'S most persistent impression as he drove back to town was Evelyn's conviction that she had seen Haggerty. He could believe that Sir Philip, in his then existing frame of mind, might well be the victim of hallucination, but with Evelyn that seemed impossible. Turning the matter over in his mind, it suddenly occurred to him that he had once read something in the Medical Journal which might apply to Haggerty's reappearance.

Arrived at Harley Street, he at once began searching through past files of the Journal for the article in question. It took him an hour to find it, but when he did so all doubts in his own mind were cleared. Taking that particular file with him, he hurried to the Psychic Research Club, where Crawford was staying. Luckily he found Crawford in. Before showing him the article, he related all that Evelyn had told him about her experience with Haggerty. Crawford admitted being puzzled, until Vyvyan, opening the Journal, pointed out the paragraph he had found. This is what Crawford read.

'Ghujat Chundra Bey, Hindoo fakir, substantiates the feasibility of Suspended Animation by submitting to underground burial for three days. When disinterred, the fakir was apparently none the worse for his experience.'

Crawford jumped to his feet. "Heavens!" he exclaimed. "I should have thought of that before. Probably I ignored it on account of Haggerty's age."

"Then you think it can be done . . . that this Hindoo's trick was authentic?" Vyvyan questioned.

"Why yes," Crawford answered. "People have actually been buried in error in a cataleptic trance. If the cemetery of the Hertford gaol is accessible from the outside, Haggerty's assistant, probably the pseudo-Shadakhari, was watching the opportunity, prepared in advance for such a development."

He lifted the telephone receiver, and gave the number of the gaol. The information he gained there was the first step in the chain of proof he required.

"Come, Vyvyan," he said then, "the only way to prove the matter conclusively is to obtain a disinterment order. We may catch the Home Secretary before he leaves his office."

Vyvyan knew the Home Secretary personally, who listened to Crawford's request without being much impressed. The prison doctor had certified to Haggerty's death, as the records showed. Mention was made of the fact that rigor mortis had already set in when Haggerty's death was discovered.

"The best proof yet of self-imposed catalepsy," Crawford said. "No harm can be done by disinterring the coffin."

The Home Secretary wrote the order himself. "Let me know what you discover," he said. "If Haggerty has escaped the law in that way, she is still a criminal at large, in which case I must get Scotland Yard on her trail at once."

"As a special concession, I should like to ask you not to do that at once," Crawford requested. "Officially, she is dead. There is of course equal chance that she may actually be dead. If she is not, I should like to handle the matter myself for a while. She failed in her attempt against Miss Parkinson's life, and I am convinced that she will try again, digging a pit in which she can be trapped. In spite of her extremely advanced age, she has remained hidden for over fifteen years. Now, if her escape is made public, it will give her too much warning."

"You seem fairly convinced she is still alive," the Home Secretary smiled.

"As a matter of fact, I am," Crawford replied.

"Yours is an unusual request, but I will grant it," the Home Secretary ceded. "To ensure secrecy long enough for your purpose, I will telephone the Governor of the gaol, and instruct him to select the grave-diggers from his long term prisoners."

As the reader already knows, at the gaol they found not only the grave empty, but the coffin missing as well. The question then was, where had she remained hidden? Wherever it was, it was somewhere to give her access to the interior of the Manor. Inside the Manor itself seemed a probable solution.

They went to Moatlands Park. Miss Parkinson was glad to see them, and, without being told the exact object of their search, was content to leave the matter in Vyvyan's hands, and their investigations to themselves.

They started with the fernery, as that was the only immediate means of exit from the library; besides which, they concluded that the orchid must have been always within Haggerty's reach.

There were two gardeners in the fernery making some adjustments. All the orchids had been removed. Crawford asked one of the men if there were any means of ingress besides the door that led outside.

"Sure, sir, if you know where to look for it," the man replied. "If you like, I'll show you."

"Do," Crawford said.

The gardener conducted them between some of the larger ferns to where, close to the wall of the house, there was a hinged grating. Beneath this grating were a number of hot water pipes, with room for a person to move about among them.

"This heating system must have been put in a long time after the house was built," the man informed them. "The furnace is in a built-in compartment below the kitchens, and there is a passage running the full length of the pipes to make access to them possible in case of damage."

"Just the one tunnel?" Crawford asked.

"That's all, sir. It goes beyond here to beneath the glass houses on the Western side. Those and the fernery here are really the only ones that require steam heat."

"Then we could get into the passage here, and follow the pipes to the boiler room?"

"You might not, sir. If the door is locked at all, it would be locked on the other side. It isn't often locked, sir. There's only the gardeners know about it."

"But anyone who did know about it could get into the house at night if he wanted to?"

"He could, sir, if the library door wasn't locked."

"Then it isn't always locked?"

"Not always, sir. You see, sir, Sir Philip was in the habit of coming down here at any time during the day or night to look at that orchid. Besides, there's little chance of any burglaries out here."

"We would like to look along the tunnel," Crawford suggested. "Are there any lights?"

"No, sir. You'll have to carry a lantern. If you like, I'll come with you to get one, and come back through the tunnel with you."

Exploration of the tunnel proved that, although her means of entry was now clear, Haggerty's hiding place had not been discovered. And further search about the Manor and the park failed to reveal that.

Although Crawford was sure that Haggerty would reveal herself in another scheme against Miss Parkinson, he set himself the task of trying to find her before she had time to perpetrate further mischief. For two months he traced the movements of different bands of roving gypsies who came occasionally to the common land, and of whom Haggerty

had boasted she was queen. He failed to find any trace of her, or of anyone approaching what her age must now be.

Lady Disston was spending the summer on her estates in Scotland. She had written to ask Vyvyan for fuller particulars than were given in the newspapers. In addition he told her the nature of his alliance with Evelyn. Lady Disston replied that she did not think Evelyn would have entered into such a contract unless she were conscious of a warmer feeling than friendship. She sent Evelyn a warm invitation to visit her in Scotland, and Vyvyan persuaded her to accept. Her ladyship's further letters were very encouraging, but in theirs neither Evelyn or Vyvyan mentioned love. Evelyn had insisted upon that. Nevertheless, her letters gradually became more cheerful, and Vyvyan expected to find a great change in her when she returned to Moatlands Park. Neither was he mistaken. Haggerty's blow having been struck, there was a period of immunity from any suggestion of her influence.

That lasted for a short time only. A week after her home-coming Vyvyan was advising her to go away again. The expression of dread was again in her eyes, even more pronounced than when she had spoken of her revulsion for orchids. Another week, and he was glad she had refused. Her nervousness had increased to such an extent that he feared letting her out of his sight.

Wherever Haggerty was, it became certain that she was again exerting her weird telepathic influence on Miss Parkinson. In fact, Evelyn once admitted to him that Haggerty had been very near to her in her dreams. Seeking her

hiding-place, he had the park combed again, but without result. He was beginning to fear Haggerty himself. The necessary, constant watchfulness was sufficient to engender that.

Vyvyan was losing confidence in himself. He had been obliged to solicit assistance from another surgeon in a simple trepanning operation . . . something quite unprecedented. Lack of progress with Evelyn made him decide to stay away from Moatlands Park for a time. That did not improve matters. His absence was for two days only, but it was long enough for him to realize something of the intensive influence that had gripped the Parkinsons. If it was so with him, what must it be with Evelyn!

Seeing him again, Evelyn was struck by his haggard appearance. "You are wearing yourself to a shadow," she said. "Is it kind to make me responsible for that?"

"You are responsible for my anxiety only," he answered. "You promised to submit to my protection, and . . ."

"I have already trespassed too far."

"You must let me be the judge of that, Evelyn. I am beginning to think it is not so much my assistance as my love that you scorn."

Evelyn shook her head sadly as she returned: "You are unjust to say that. I shall never scorn your love, but even your love is a reproach when I think of the misfortune it has brought on you already. You are losing prestige in your profession. Lady Disston is worried about you. You are neglecting your old and valued friends because of me. Believe me, Eustace, I value your love as something of which

I could never be worthy, and for which I could never repay you. Does not that satisfy you?"

"Nothing will satisfy me except the privilege of giving you the extra protection of my name . . . the privilege of being with you always," he answered.

"It is impossible," she said sadly.

"Then you think you could never love me?"

"It isn't that. I dare not think of love when I consider all that it entails. Won't you please accept my gratitude, and escape while there is yet time?"

"Those words confirm what I have been thinking," he said quickly. "You are keeping something from me."

She admitted it, saying: "Yes, there is something I cannot tell you. It concerns only myself . . . at present. Something which I pray every hour of the day may happen before we—if you still wish to hold me to my promise—unite our lives indissolubly. Please do not ask me what it is. If it concerned you too, you would know already."

"It is connected with Haggerty, of course," he suggested.

"It is. There is nothing else of which I am afraid. You know that. If it were danger from any other source, I would not hesitate to tell you. If I cannot love you, I am at least sincere in my desire to protect you from such calamity as will hang over this house until it is exterminated."

"I promised to relinquish all claim on you only on a condition which involves two others," he replied. "Either you were to be satisfied that you no longer needed protection, or that you could not love me."

She made no response to this, so he continued: "If you will but confide in me, we may be able to do something together. By your silence you are aiding Haggerty in her infernal schemes. Let me bring Crawford to see you. He defeated her before. He can do so again."

"To what purpose?" she demanded. "If I live, your life, far more valuable than mine, will in the end be seriously implicated. What if Dr. Crawford saves my life again? Haggerty's curse will still be fulfilled in some other way. Would you see me live, to grow insane like my uncle, or to live in prolonged torture as my father did?"

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed, but added: "Haggerty cannot escape all the time. Crawford is weaving a net . . ."

"I am wearied beyond endurance by this discussion," she said, not unkindly. "Take me into the garden for a while. I feel faint for fresh air."

He felt there was nothing to do but comply with her request. A French window opened from the room where they were on to a lawn by the Western Court. Beyond were the rose gardens, with the summer roses still in bloom. Everything was so peaceful as they stepped outside that, except for the oppression gnawing at his heart, it seemed impossible to conceive that this earthly paradise was the haunt of a fiend of hell. He glanced at the lovely girl by his side, gloriously beautiful in spite of the sorrow that was sapping her youth like a cankerworm at the heart of one of the roses. Man-like, he failed to appreciate the unselfish motive that governed her reticence. He could not understand her resistance to his entreaties to reveal the pest, so that to

gether they might trample it underfoot and destroy it. He could better understand her resistance to his appeals for her love, though his own love was surging madly through every vein in his body. She tried valiantly to dispel his gloomy thoughts by discussing other topics, but he failed to respond. Finally they relapsed into walking the scent-laden paths in silence. The light touch of her fingers on his arm thrilled every nerve, and filled him with voluptuous longing, but he stifled the impulse to close over them the fingers of his disengaged hand, fearing that hers would be withdrawn altogether.

She paused as they came to a trellised arch covered with tuberoses.

"These are Moatlands Park specials," she explained, as he came to a standstill by her side. "They were cultivated here, and they are the only ones of their kind in existence. Only by special privilege can one be worn. Let me pick one for you."

She reached upwards as she spoke to an opening bud of delicate beauty. As quickly, she recoiled in horror, uttering a faint scream, and clinging to his arm for support. Before she could touch the flower, a small spider had dropped from it towards her hand, and now hung suspended upon an almost invisible thread.

The sensation uppermost in Vyvyan's mind was the delicious thrill this closer contact with her fingers gave him. Then he was amazed at this unexpected outburst of timidity on her part. Her nerves must be terribly unstrung. He could not imagine her normally afraid of a garden spider.

Just then, somehow, he did not want to break the delicious spell cast by her trembling fingers. Inside the man there was sufficient of the brute to thank the spider for its timely appearance, even if it did mean the loss of the rose.

He had barely time to be conscious of that thought before the spider dropped a few inches lower, and Evelyn shrank farther away from it. She said nothing, and it took a full minute of watching the dilated fear in her eyes for him to conceive the idea that it was more than the spider of which she was afraid . . . to remember she had said that there was nothing of which she was afraid except Haggerty. If there was some connection, it was now he must force her to tell him, even at the risk of losing her altogether. And he could think of only one way. For her sake he decided to take the risk.

His arm was supporting her, and, as he drew her to himself, his pent-up emotion gave way. Hungrily he clasped her more tightly, and showered passionate kisses upon her upturned face, her eyes, her lips. It was the first time he had attempted to kiss her since the night of Sir Philip's death. For a few moments she suffered his caresses unresistingly; then, with an effort, she tried to break away from him.

"You are unkind," he had left her barely enough breath to whisper. "Please let me go!"

But the contact of her lips had quickened beyond restraint the fires of his smouldering passion, and he banished his fear of her displeasure.

"I won't let you go!" he exclaimed, kissing her again and again. "You are mine, and I will be denied no longer the privilege of loving you . . . and kissing you, even if my kisses are distasteful. You gave yourself to me, and yet denied me everything that pertained to my right of possession. I will make you tell me what is troubling you, if I have to smother you with kisses until you promise to do so."

"Is there no other alternative?" she asked feebly.

At that he laughed, and almost thrust her from him. He saw the faint colour that was mantling her cheeks, so pallid before, and felt the throbbing of her heart against his, but neither conveyed any other meaning to him than that they were the results of her struggling against him. No, he would give her no other alternative, and told her so.

In his laugh . . . in his speech which followed . . . she read the construction he had placed on her words, and her fortitude almost gave way as she replied: "Then I must tell you. I am sufficiently weak to lack strength for sustained resistance."

Then he released her, though he said fiercely: "Then tell me!"

She had tried to speak coldly, wishing her words to convey to him, as they did, that her yielding was but submission to the force he had used. He had tasted her kiss again, and for a moment or two had thought that it was not given reluctantly. But her words strangled the expression of endearment that was on his lips. He could not utter it now. Rather he felt like a gambler who has staked his all on a last throw of the dice.

"Perhaps it is better that I should, then you will see how impossible what you ask is," she said.

"I understand that already," he replied bitterly.

"What you cannot understand is that there can be a friendship which is akin to love . . . a something which makes you very dear to me as a friend, even though I cannot place my heart unreservedly in your hands," she returned quietly.

"Just now I would have plucked a rose for you in token of that friendship."

"Yet you wish to be released from the only legitimate bond which gives me the right to continue that friendship."

"I didn't say that. I see it is impossible to make you cease to be anxious for me, so I relinquish the struggle."

"You mean . . . you will stand by our contract?"

"Yes. If I am alive at the end of six months I will marry you, and try to give you everything your heart desires."

"Then, darling, you must love me!" he exclaimed.

"Let me tell you what I must, then you will perhaps understand why I cannot admit thoughts of love," she said.

"You are amazed, quite naturally, that I am terrified at a garden spider, such as there must be everywhere among these roses, after telling you there was only one thing of which I was afraid. The reason is, I have seen Haggerty again; not in the flesh, but in my dreams; not once only, but several times. Then I dream of spiders . . . thousands of spiders floating through the air on webs of gossamer lightness . . . tiny black spiders, and they float towards me until I obstruct their passage. They swarm upon me in myriads. Then,

when I feel myself succumbing to the venom they inject into my body, I see Haggerty. Sometimes she speaks, although I cannot hear what she would say; sometimes she silently points a finger of scorn, and where she points I see you, covered as well by the crawling, loathsome insects."

"You said I was not involved," he reminded her.

"I lied to you, to save you from her," Evelyn said. "It is the first time in my life that I have stooped to such a thing. I considered I was justified in my effort to save you. Sometimes I feel . . . I think you have suggested the same as one of the opinions of Dr. Crawford . . . that it is only in the foreknowledge of her schemes that Haggerty can pursue her relentless vengeance. I thought, if you did not already know of the spiders, you were safe."

"Surely, dear," he said more tenderly, marveling at the fortitude which would lead to self-sacrifice, first for Sir Philip's sake, then for his, "you did not think I would leave you to face a thing like this, even if my dearest hopes can never be realized?"

"No, I don't think I did," she answered. "It was just my wish. Perhaps I was wrong. Sooner or later it was her evil purpose that I should tell you. When I saw the spider fall from the rose I could feel my will being subjected, all my resistance against the inevitable giving way before the terrible force of her power. I am not sorry I kissed you. It is but little repayment for all that you have done . . . all that you have endured. Yet I hate myself for yielding to your embraces, repaying your kisses with the betrayal of a Judas."

Vyvyan was staggered, not only at the words of this last statement of hers, but also at the manner in which she made it. She stated it as a simple fact, a truth every word of which she believed. He stepped towards the trellised, flowering arch, intent upon proving the harmlessness of the spider whose almost invisible thread scintillated in the sunlight.

But even as he reached out his hand to capture it, it fell quickly to the ground, and was as quickly hidden in the soil. He could not account for the impression, but it seemed to have been snatched from him by an invisible hand, and he experienced a sensation like a sudden blast of cold air chilling his spine. His failure to capture it had been observed by Evelyn, and she said: "I did not think you could capture it any more than my father could capture the raven. Haggerty has sent it, and the dream spiders, as a warning, even as she sent the raven as a warning to him."

He pulled himself together savagely, and turned to her. "I wish I could convince you that the idea is absurd," he said. "Haggerty has been on your mind, and you have dreamed of spiders. One dream of that description, in your present nervous condition, would be sufficient to engender others."

She did not reply to that, so he tried another argument. "If Haggerty came to you in the flesh again, and offered you a poisonous draught, would you drink it while you had the strength to refuse?" he asked her.

Her answer proved that for the moment it was useless to discuss the matter further. "I know I should not have the strength to refuse," she said.

CHAPTER XXIV

MIRANDA MAKES FURTHER DISCLOSURES

TWO days later Lady Disston returned from Scotland, and, to Vyvyan's intense relief, Evelyn accepted an invitation to stay with her at her town house. With her safe in London, he ceased to worry about the dream spiders. Indeed, quiet reasoning with himself had almost assured him that what he had said to Evelyn was correct, that her subsequent dreams were but nervous aggravations of her first nightmare about them. And it was natural that she should have Haggerty constantly in her thoughts. Besides, even at Moatlands Park, except for her fear, he felt that she was temporarily safe. There were no spiders of a poisonous description in the country that he could discover. But he was still troubled about her fear of Haggerty, seeing that Haggerty was indisputably alive. He mentioned that fear the first time he saw Crawford, after another week had passed. He mentioned it, not with reference to Evelyn herself, but in conversation about the death of her father, which subject Crawford himself introduced.

"So far as I can ascertain, it was fear that killed him . . . fear, and seeing Haggerty. Her reappearance, he believing her dead, would be sufficient to provoke it," he said.

"Then you think it is possible for fear to kill . . . actually kill?" Vyvyan asked him, unconvinced.

"My dear Vyvyan," Crawford answered, forgetting the agony of mind his words caused his friend, "outside of experiments in sorcery you can find numerous examples of that. Death by simple suggestion is common in some parts of the world. Take the 'Death Prayer' of the Kanaka priest, for example," he continued, unconsciously enthusiastic over his own theories. "The High Priest of Pele breathes the 'Death Prayer' over an individual, and that individual dies. Sometimes, not always, he undergoes self-immolation in the crater of Pele, but even then it is virtually death by psychic influence . . . through superstitious fear. In the Philippines there is a similar rite. Those drugs which I used in the case of your fiancée, and which are more powerful than an anaesthetic in producing entire lack of sensation, including loss of locomotion, are the only known things that can resist the 'death call'. They were the secret prescription of a deposed witch doctor until I obtained the recipes from him.

"Orthodox religions call such, or similar manifestations, the result of faith. Actually it is fear. Our own bible advises that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom', and my interpretation of that passage is perfectly literal. Strip any religion of its fear, and it soon becomes a caricature, like our own Christian religion of today, in ninety percent of the churches. After all, if you analyze the two, there is very little discrimination between faith and fear. Fear is really morbid faith. It operates along the same lines. To a savage, religion is all fear; and it doesn't

matter a damn whether he believe in a god or a devil, the result is the same."

"What hope is there for Evelyn if she is up against that kind of fear?" Vyvyan asked dejectedly.

"The hope of a sane mind which you can help to cultivate," Crawford answered. "I have not tried to minimize what you may be up against, for it is as well to be prepared against the worst. But there is the bright side to it as well. There is no controlling the death fear when it is used upon an untutored savage, whom civilization has not denuded of the fundamentals of his religion, but . . ."

"You would hardly classify Richard Parkinson as such a savage," Vyvyan interjected.

"Richard Parkinson need not have died," Crawford said emphatically. "I thought I had him persuaded into believing that he could vanquish any fear of Haggerty. Miss Parkinson . . ."

"Is already beset by that fear," Vyvyan said gloomily.

"How do you mean?" Crawford questioned. "Nothing new, I hope."

Vyvyan told him then of the episode of the spider in the rose gardens, and of Evelyn's dream spiders.

"Migrating spiders," was Crawford's comment when he had finished.

"You recognize the species?"

"Yes . . . the tiniest spiders extant. Called 'migrating spiders' from their habits. They have a peculiar means of ensuring their migration, too. They spin their webs on the tops of grasses in the meadows, making them quite compact

in places, and scattered in others. That ensures propulsion by the slightest wind blowing. When ready to travel, they bite through their anchorage, so being caught up by the wind and wafted from one field to another."

"Are they poisonous?" Vyvyan asked him.

"Indeed no. Quite harmless, in fact. They seldom bite, and when they do they cause but a slight irritation, much less acute than the bite of an ordinary ant."

"I have never heard of them," Vyvyan said.

"That is not surprising," Crawford returned. "They are not found in this country, though they are plentiful enough in the meadows of Northern France and Flanders."

"Thank heaven for that . . . that they are not found here!" Vyvyan ejaculated fervently. "Evelyn is safe from them here."

"She would be safe from them anywhere," Crawford rejoined. "Of course, we have got to dispel her fear of them. If Haggerty is counting on that alone . . ."

He was interrupted there by the ringing of the telephone. Vyvyan picked up the receiver.

"This is the Middlesex Hospital," explained the caller. "There is an accident patient here, a girl . . . run over by a bus. She is anxious to get into touch with Dr. Crawford. If he is in England, Dr. Vyvyan, I thought perhaps you could locate him for us. It seems to be a matter of importance."

"Dr. Crawford is right here," Vyvyan said. "Hold the line, please."

He handed the receiver to Crawford.

"Who is she?" Crawford asked, after a moment.

"A psychic reader and clairvoyante. She calls herself Madame Lois Delarge."

"I'll be right along," Crawford said quickly. He turned to Vyvyan eagerly. "My lost memory patient . . . Haggerty's medium. At last we're on the track of something tangible. Come!"

The house surgeon on duty conducted them to the ward. Miranda recognized Crawford at once. "I remember your coming to look into my eyes like Mother Haggerty did, to make me go into a trance," she said. "Mother Haggerty was afraid of you, and they took me away. She gave me back my memory. Then, after Michello had betrayed me and refused to marry me, I learned that it was she who stole it from me. I want to get even with Michello."

"Who is Michello?" Crawford asked.

"Her son. You may not find her, although she did not die, but you will find him if you watch the gypsies. He promised to marry me, and make me their queen. That was why I became lady's maid when the other died. I opened the door for them. I used to be Miranda the gypsy."

"They were both in the house?"

"Yes. Mother Haggerty can do terrible things, but she didn't kill the lady alone. It was Michello who had the needle. I think he pricked the poison into her back to paralyse her. Mother Haggerty said you wouldn't look for poison, because you believe in magic. The image was a farce, although it might have killed her. She was frightened when she saw Mother Haggerty."

MIRANDA MAKES DISCLOSURES 283

"Why didn't you tell of this before?" Crawford asked.

"I was afraid. Mother Haggerty would discover it, and kill me," Miranda answered. "Now, I am dying, and she cannot hurt me."

"You know where she is?" Crawford was eager.

"No."

"You would tell us if you knew?"

"Yes. Didn't she steal my memory . . . making me live in darkness for years, and mocking me when Michello betrayed me? I could go into a trance for you again," she added. "Perhaps I could find her for you."

The house surgeon hesitated about giving his sanction until Miranda added: "It won't hurt me. I'm dying anyway."

With such a practised medium as Miranda, hypnosis was a simple matter. Her will was already given.

"Travel in space until you find her!" Crawford commanded when she was completely under his control.

"I *am* traveling in space," came the faint answer.

"Try to remember where you are going!"

"I have found her," the words came mechanically. "I have crossed the water, and I see her spirit beckoning to me. I know where she is, for I have been there before with her, years ago."

"Where is that?"

"Rheims. It was near to Rheims that she took me from my parents, and made me a gypsy. I am afraid to go nearer. I am coming back."

True enough, a shudder shook her frame, showing how great Haggerty's influence was still upon her, stronger than Crawford's will. A moment later her eyes opened, but she had told them all they required to know . . . enough to make Vyvyan realize that the spiders might be more than a dream. Rheims . . . Northern France and Flanders, Crawford had told him, where the migrating spiders were very numerous. Thank God Evelyn was in England, and they could keep her there!

That hope was short-lived. When they returned to Harley Street, Vyvyan found a note from Lady Disston awaiting him. He opened it anxiously, wondering what the message could be. That message staggered him with its now awful import.

"Evelyn has accepted my advice, and has agreed to go abroad for a while," Lady Disston wrote. "I left it to her to decide upon a destination, and she has suggested *Rheims*. I think it is a good suggestion, for I can conceive of nothing more restful for her than a few weeks spent within the precincts and environment of that grand old cathedral. You need a change, too, my dear Eustace, so you had better come along with us. Your persuasion may be more powerful than mine in preventing Evelyn from entering a convent. She has mentioned it several times, and I have thought, seriously."

"What is it?" Crawford asked him, as his hand fell listlessly from holding the note before his eyes.

"Read it for yourself," Vyvyan returned dejectedly. "That girl was evidently speaking the truth," he went on, as Crawford perused the missive. "Rheims . . . Haggerty

there . . the migrating spiders! And now Evelyn has decided to go there! The whole of Haggerty's infernal scheme is developing with abominable rapidity. Fortunately, we can prevent her from going."

"I don't think so," Crawford returned quietly.

"You don't mean to say she would walk open-eyed into a deathtrap?" Vyvyan ejaculated.

"If Haggerty's influence is calling her to Rheims, I don't think anything but death would stop her," Crawford said convincingly.

Vyvyan shuddered as he remembered what Evelyn herself had answered to his question . . "If Haggerty offered you a poisonous draught, would you drink it?" "I know I should not have the strength to refuse," she had said.

"You saw what happened in the case of the orchid," Crawford was adding. "Taking everything into consideration, the effect of my drug against Haggerty's influence was only of short duration . . happily, just long enough. If I took a chance, and administered the drug again, the effect would wear off just the same, and I should not like to answer for the effect of repeated doses."

"She should be warned that it is Haggerty who has given her the idea of Rheims," Vyvyan asserted.

Crawford contended, however: "No. Until she becomes aware of that fact herself, I think it better for her to be kept in ignorance. Time enough for her to start worrying . . ."

"I'll not consent to it!" Vyvyan declared hotly.

"My dear fellow," Crawford returned, not in the least disturbed, "you might as well look this matter straight in the face. There will be no harm done by letting Miss Parkinson go to Rheims, there may be material harm done if an attempt is made to stop her from going. Not only that, but if we are to get Haggerty, Miss Parkinson is the only one who can lead us to her."

"And use her as a decoy then?" Vyvyan smarted.

"Bluntly, yes."

"Why can't we go to Rheims and search for Haggerty?"

"We could, but I don't think the result would amount to much. The way she has moved around without detection except when she chose to reveal herself proves that she must be a specialist in disguises. The fact that the first part of her plot failed to materialize would put her on her guard. That is another reason why Miss Parkinson must not be told. If Haggerty can see things even as clearly as that poor girl in the hospital . . ."

"It is a hellish power," Vyvyan blurted.

"In her hands, I agree with you," Crawford replied. "As a matter of fact, if more people knew how to use it, it would be regarded as one of the most natural forces of the Universe. To my mind, this plot of Haggerty's is weaker than the orchid, although that . . . with what the gypsy girl told us . . . shows that she does not dare depend upon psychic forces alone. This is weaker because it has been more hastily devised. There is certainly no venom to encounter, even if Miss Parkinson ran into a veritable swarm of the spiders. If she goes to Rheims, we shall be on the spot to frustrate

MIRANDA MAKES DISCLOSURES. 287

what Haggerty purposes to accomplish by personal contact. Not only that, but we shall get Haggerty, and that is the only way to rid ourselves of the perpetual menace of her deviltry."

"Perhaps you're right, Allan," Vyvyan acquiesced, without enthusiasm. "What are you going to do about this fellow Michello?"

"Wait until we get his mother, and then put Scotland Yard on his track. Hadn't you better go to see Miss Parkinson or Lady Disston, to tell them to go ahead with the arrangements?"



CHAPTER XXV

EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE

I feel as if I were going on a pilgrimage, visiting that wonderful old cathedral," Evelyn said, when discussing the project with Vyvyan, back again at Moatlands Park. It is good of you to spare the time to come with us. Lady Disston may be claiming you as her special attendant, but I want you to realize that you are my chosen escort as well."

"You are kind to say that," Vyvyan replied.

"Then please don't look so worried," Evelyn went on. "Or, is there something in the prospect doesn't please you?"

"You have mentioned a convent to Lady Disston, and Belgium is a Catholic country," he seized upon the first excuse that occurred to him. "I have still my duties as your selected guardian to perform . . ."

"If you were not such a bear at times, you would really make a delightful guardian," she said, smiling.

". . . and my interests as your affianced husband to protect," he finished.

She made a little grimace. "Must you always introduce that subject?" she asked.

"It is the subject nearest my heart."

EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE 289

"Then it should be a pleasure to keep it there . . . locked in a secret chamber. I don't mean that unkindly," she added quickly. "You don't mind waiting?"

"Six months is a long time to wait," he said.

"While I tremble to think of all I have promised then," she replied. "In the meantime, let me enjoy you as a guardian. Are you not until then satisfied with a guardian's privileges?"

"I might be, if I had them all," he said.

"And which haven't you?" she queried.

"Well," he answered, puzzling to enumerate them to the best advantage, " . . . a normal, healthy guardian, likes sometimes to be coaxed . . . to be petted . . . to be . . . "

With a little laugh she crossed the room quickly, and sat upon the arm of his chair, bending her cheek until it almost touched his hair, which she stroked playfully.

"You don't need to be coaxed," she said, "and now . . . you are being petted. What else?"

"To be kissed occasionally," he suggested, raising his head to look into her eyes.

Her lips, parted as if in surprise, were very close to his . . . invitingly close, he thought. He reached up his hand to her head, to pull it down towards his. Then . . .

His hand fell again as the remembrance came to him that he was allowing her to go to Rheims, into what might be a zone of unconquerable danger . . . to assist Crawford in trapping Haggerty. He, her guardian, was letting her go, without warning, under the misconception that her pilgrimage to the cathedral there was of her own originating, while, from

somewhere in Rheims or near, Haggerty had done the originating by means of her malign telepathy. His heart sank within him as he recalled what Evelyn had said to him in the garden, when his kisses had forced her to reveal what she thought to be Haggerty's design against her.

"I repaid your kisses with the betrayal of a Judas!" she had said. Heavens! Her conception had been wrong, but what of his, if he should kiss her now?

"I dare not," he groaned, sinking his head.

Evelyn was surprised, but thought she understood. He was afraid he would crush her to himself, as he had done in the garden; he dare not kiss her as a guardian, because such a kiss would not satisfy. He loved her too passionately. She was almost prepared to admit that her own heart was not so cold as she would have had him believe, but he did not ask her, and she shrank from giving the information unasked. Besides, it would not be fair to him to bind him more irrevocably to herself. Later, she might wish again to try to persuade him to escape from Haggerty's clutches before by marriage he became too deeply involved. Nevertheless, she said, rallying: "Really, Eustace, for a normal, healthy guardian, you act strangely. I offer you what you ask and . . ."

It seemed that all the devils in hell were torturing his soul as he detected the encouragement in her words. Perhaps never again would he have such an opportunity to hold her in his arms . . . the third time since he had known her . . . each time under the impulse of some savage emotion. When she learned of his deception, she would turn from him

EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE 291

with loathing and scorn, horror in her eyes such as he had witnessed that first time in the fernery on the night of Sir Philip's death. He felt she was his . . . tantalizingly his . . . now. It would at least be one more kiss to remember as he passed into the eternal courts of the damned! Meanwhile, he would take what the gods offered!

He raised his head. His arm encircled her shoulders, and, with a hungry gesture, he pulled her whole body down until her head rested on his own shoulder, while the passionate kiss he forced between her lips filled her with a momentary intoxication . . . before she had time to be startled by his emotion. For that moment she lay unresisting in his arms, while he only released her lips to breathe: "Darling, you *do* love me!"

It would have been easy for her to capitulate then . . . to tell him of the responsive echo his kisses had awakened in her own heart. But remorse seized him again, and prevented him from asking, even while the fragrance of her lips was still moist upon his.

"Don't tell me now!" he said hoarsely. "Wait until I can ask you without my guardianship providing an unworthy excuse."

"Your sense of guardianship does not seem to impose very severe limits," she said, resting quietly where she was.

Her eyes were sparkling as he looked into them. Her lips were still parted as if in anticipation of another kiss. As he did not speak, she made a forlorn gesture, thinking she understood.

"You are right," she said. "I was wrong to tempt you like that. I suppose there are certain impulses which are irresistible. When you kiss me I seem to be inspired by one of them, and it has been the same each time you have kissed me."

What he would have replied to that was prevented by a servant announcing Lady Disston. Her ladyship had come to make final arrangements for their voyage, and she and Vyvyan left Moatlands Park at the same time.

They left for the Continent the next day. Crawford had already gone, and with him was Judge Worthington. The judge, who would have tried Haggerty for the murder of Marie, had, since his retirement to the surrogate list, taken an active interest in psychic research, and Crawford had met him at the Club in Piccadilly. Lady Disston and her party traveled from Ostend to Rheims by night.

They engaged rooms at the Hotel St. Maurice, which is not far from the cathedral. Persisting in the idea that their sojourn in Rheims was of the nature of a pilgrimage, Miss Parkinson spent a great deal of time in the cathedral with Lady Disston, who encouraged her in the hope that an outburst of religious zeal might do much to eradicate the impressions Haggerty had caused, and which, knowing nothing about the spiders, she attributed to Sir Philip's death. This gave Vyvyan opportunities to visit Crawford and Judge Worthington, who were staying at a hotel not far from the St. Maurice.

Once Vyvyan went outside the city limits. Everywhere in the fields the spiders were numerous, and already they had

EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE 293

begun to migrate. He was surprised that he encountered none in the city itself, but concluded that the outlying houses would obstruct their passage through the streets. As Evelyn evinced no desire to leave the heart of the city, he began to hope that Haggerty had taken alarm, and had relinquished her scheme. On the fourth day in Rheims, however, he had cause to realize his mistake.

He was with Lady Disston and Evelyn in the cathedral that afternoon. A gusty wind, veering suddenly from the northeast, swept the narrow streets as they emerged. They were descending the cathedral steps when Evelyn clutched Vyvyan's arm convulsively. His heart almost stopped beating as he saw her pallor, and followed her petrified gaze across the square to where, dancing in the sunlight, yet floating with unconscious ease, was a tangled mass of milk-white gossamer such as he had seen in the fields. Before Lady Disston had time to realize there was something wrong, Evelyn sank unconscious into Vyvyan's arms.

With the chauffeur's assistance Vyvyan got her into a convenient taxi, and they drove to the hotel. Though but a short distance away, he had time to discern that it was no ordinary fainting spell. Her convulsive shuddering as he carried her up the stairs to her room reminded him of how he had seen her on that terrible night at Moatlands Park. Whether Haggerty had any connection with the spiders on the square or not, the stupefying suddenness with which Evelyn's faculties had become numbed pointed to the fact that Haggerty was behind the seizure. It was the beginning

of the end, and into his brain hammered the undeniable accusation that he had brought her knowingly into it.

He wanted to go to Crawford, but he had to wait until Evelyn was settled in bed. He paced the corridor while Lady Disston assisted Evelyn's maid to get her there. One thing he realized with a feeling of gladness. Her ladyship, usually a victim of nervous prostration in a time of emergency, was sustaining herself with remarkable fortitude.

However, she asked him anxiously: "What do you think can be the matter, Eustace?"

"Overfatigue possibly," he answered, trying to speak reassuringly. "Concentrating too much on the object of her pilgrimage."

"She was perfectly well this morning," her ladyship said. "It appeared to me like the result of a sudden fright, but what could have frightened her?"

"You didn't see anything that could have frightened her?" he parried uneasily.

"Not a thing."

One glance beneath Evelyn's eyelids was again sufficient to prove the form of coma she was in. It was like her condition before, when she had become quiet after the one awful paroxysm he had witnessed. Would she again be subject to the same form of hallucination?

He read the same question in the eyes of Evelyn's maid, who had also seen her mistress on that other occasion. He had not thought of such a contingency before. He must see her alone somehow, and warn her against saying anything to Lady Disston.

EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE 295

Her ladyship was moving about the room seeking some means of giving assistance. That suggested an opening to Vyvyan.

"Don't you bother," he said to her. "Evelyn will be all right shortly, and you will only suffer from a reaction yourself. There's nothing else can be done at the moment. If you could spare your own maid to assist if necessary . . ."

"I'll send her to you now," Lady Disston said, and went quickly from the room.

The maid reassured him immediately he questioned her.

"I haven't said a word to her ladyship, sir," she told him. "Miss Parkinson made me promise one day that I would never speak of it to a soul."

"That's good. If Lady Disston knew, it would mean that I should have two patients on my hands instead of one."

"I understand, sir. You don't think, sir, that this is going to be"

"I don't know yet what it is going to be," Vyvyan said quickly. "But I want to feel that I can rely on you to carry out my instructions."

"Indeed yes, sir."

"I shall have to go out to get something I need," he said then. "If your mistress becomes restless while I am away, try to keep her as quiet as you can. If Lady Disston's maid asks any questions, say that your mistress is accustomed to occasional prolonged fainting seizures."

"I'll do that, sir."

Vyvyan hastened from the hotel to find Crawford. There was a telephone, but he thought it better to see him person-

ally. Crawford was half expecting him. He himself had encountered some of the spiders in the city, and surmised what the result would be if Miss Parkinson saw them as well.

"Can you come along with me?" Vyvyan asked him.

"If Lady Disston should see me it would entail too many explanations," Crawford answered. "She doesn't know anything yet, and it would be better to prevent her from suspecting anything. It won't be necessary for me to come."

He took his case of drugs from his pocket, and handed a small phial to Vyvyan. "You can make an injection of this as I did before," he said. "Just one drop."

"Is it the same as you used?"

"Exactly, but the quantity is not so great."

"Why not?"

"Because, if we are to get Haggerty, the effect must not last so long. Miss Parkinson will probably have farther to go. My dear Vyvyan," he added kindly, as Vyvyan was about to expostulate, "I know I am putting your love for Miss Parkinson to the most severe test possible, asking you to let her walk into what appears to be danger so that we may trap Haggerty. You have got to remember that to save Miss Parkinson now, and fail to get Haggerty, means a repetition of the whole thing, in perhaps some more damnable way. Before, I had to contend against the poison element as well as Haggerty's influence. She may intend to use poison again here, but that we have to discover. Though you will inject a smaller quantity of the Philippine witch doctor's drug, that will have, if Haggerty intends the climax

for tonight, sufficient after effect to counteract in a great measure the fear Haggerty is hoping to inspire. I don't think Miss Parkinson will be in actual danger at any time, but I have prepared a draught also for you to give her if she should recover consciousness when confronted by the spiders."

"How do you think that will happen?"

"I can only surmise, of course. I am expecting it will take place in some isolated spot to which Miss Parkinson will be led as she was led to the orchid at Moatlands Park. If so, go alone with her. You have a gun?"

"No."

"Then take this one, I have another."

"What do you want me to do with it? Shoot Haggerty?"

"No. Leave her to me. I am thinking, however, that that infernal raven of hers may be in evidence. Kill it if you can. Judge Worthington and I will be on the alert, watching."

Vyvyan placed the gun and the draught in his pocket, and returned to the hotel. Very little change had taken place in Evelyn's condition during his absence. It was a matter of a few moments only to inject Crawford's preparation, and it was something of a relief to observe that its effect was instantaneously soothing.

Then he went to Lady Disston's sitting-room. He found her reclining on a sofa.

"You are not feeling the strain too much?" he asked her anxiously.

298 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

"My dear boy, no," she answered brightly. "If you were not here I should be terribly worried, but I know Evelyn is perfectly safe in your hands. How is she?"

"Sleeping quietly," he told her, thinking it wise to prevaricate. "I have made an injection which will keep her like that for some time," he added more truthfully. "It would be better not to take any risks of disturbing her."

"Of course I won't go unless you ask me to," Lady Disston said. "I think I will take advantage of the opportunity to rest today."

"It will do you good," he assured her readily. "I will send your maid back to you."

After that, the mental strain increased every hour. He was forced to keep cheerful on the one or two occasions when he saw Lady Disston, while every minute he was expecting some change to take place in Evelyn's condition . . . a change that would usher her once more into the presence of that deadly fear. He hardly knew what he himself had to fear in that respect. Crawford was confident of success. There had been neither doubt nor hesitation in his manner, but . . .

There was always that element of uncertainty to harass his mind. Haggerty might not be trapped, or they might not succeed in foiling her. Or, if they foiled her, and she escaped, her next attempt might be even worse than this, when Evelyn, having turned from him with loathing and scorn for the part he had played, would be left without even the small consolation of his doubtful guardianship. That was the thought that troubled him most as he watched the girl he

EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE 299

loved more than life itself, or paced up and down his own room in the hotel.

Occasionally he toyed with the pistol Crawford had given him, wondering if, in spite of Crawford's instructions, he would shoot Haggerty if he saw her. Crawford had not said exactly where he would be, so would it not be better to take a chance of ridding the world of her himself?

If they failed!

Another thought came persistently to him as he pondered over this possibility. If they failed, and Evelyn perished, he would be largely responsible for her death through yielding to Crawford. Life without her, were she dead, would be valueless to him. Only with her alive would life be worth anything, for, though the object of her scorn, it would take long to annihilate the hope that was in him that she would recognize his dilemma and be generous . . faint though that hope was.

But, if she died, there was still another use to which the weapon could be put.

Perhaps that was what Haggerty had intended to convey about him in her dream revelations to Evelyn! That was apparently to have been the end of Sir Philip, who had been instrumental in placing her in Haggerty's clutches before. For a while he became obsessed with the thought. He was not conscious of any personal fear of Haggerty, any more than Sir Philip had been. She had not tried to intimidate him in any way, and he was certainly not afraid of the spiders. Yes, it was possible that she counted upon this as the means of her revenge, and he laughed ironically as he

believed that, if successful in her other schemes, she would also be successful in that!

* * * * *

A long, interminable day, the leaden hours dragging slowly by! Would it never end? Maybe, among other soul-wracking uncertainties came the thought, this was not the night Haggerty had chosen to write *finis* to the tale. If not, there would be the same interminable waiting on the morrow, perhaps the next day too, with each moment increasing the suspense. At such times when, in varying moods, sometimes praying for that respite, sometimes cursing the prospect . . . feeling his senses reeling, he was sure that if something did not happen soon he would go mad. No wonder Evelyn's father had gone insane, as he now half believed, as he waited day after day for Haggerty's vengeance to fall! No wonder Sir Philip went insane as every faculty hung with suspense upon the blooming of the fateful orchid!

Varying doubts then as to that scheme of Haggerty's which embraced himself, if not the way he had thought! Did she drive all of her victims insane before death came as a release? Could it be possible that she had that scheme for him . . . days of suspense, and nights of sleeplessness, which would culminate in his own case in the mad desire to expedite the end himself!

At ten o'clock Lady Disston sent for him. He had not been near her for two hours. It was an effort to pull himself together to see her.

"I just wanted to make certain that Evelyn was all right before retiring," her ladyship said.

"She is perfectly quiet," he chose the simplest way to evade the question.

"Asleep?"

"Yes . . . soundly."

"You wouldn't think it advisable to get a nurse for the night?"

"No, I don't think it necessary."

"She must have been tired out," Lady Disston mused. "I had not observed it. She concealed it well, dear girl. You are quite convinced about the nurse? You look fairly worn out yourself."

"I'm all right," he said. "And a nurse is unnecessary. Evelyn's maid is really a capable girl."

"Lisette would help her, wouldn't you, Lisette?"

"Most certainly, my lady," Lisette answered with alacrity.

"I don't think it will be necessary," Vyvyan said again. "If I need Lisette, I will send for her."

"Sit up a little while," Lady Disston instructed the girl when the door closed on Vyvyan. "I shall sleep more comfortably if I know you are prepared."

Vyvyan went back to Evelyn's room, and watched for another hour without being aware of any change. He was barely back in his own room, however, when Evelyn's maid came to him with the intelligence that her mistress was awake, and wished to speak to him.

He was aware of a first feeling of thankfulness at the news. If Evelyn were conscious, it might mean that Haggerty's spell was broken before it had arrived at full fruition.

He followed the maid quickly. Outside the door of Evelyn's room the girl paused.

"Miss Parkinson wishes to speak to you alone, sir, so I will wait here," she said.

He entered. Evelyn's words destroyed his hopes again.

"I am going to ask Jane to dress me, and I want your assurance that you will not stop me from going out," she said, without any preamble. "I want to go to the cathedral . . . to pray."

"Isn't it too late for that?" he tried to temporize.

She directed at him a searching look of enquiry, one which contained evidence of a deeper cognizance of what was taking place, before she answered: "The cathedral is never closed. Besides, time has no significance for me now. It is too near the end for that to matter. Would you have me die without permitting me the last service I shall ever ask of you?"

He paled at the resignation in her tones, and stammered: "Don't talk like that, Evelyn!"

Again she raised her questioning eyes to his, and for a moment checked the words that rose to her lips. Then:

"Before I awoke just now I was wandering in a strange land. There was a large meadow, the grasses covered with spiders. At the end was a wood. There I saw Haggerty, and she told me many things, even as she revealed her plan about the orchid before. Until I saw the spiders today, I did not know that we had come to where they were to be found. I know now that it was her evil inspiration that sent me to visit the cathedral here, but I must go to it again.

EVELYN'S SECOND TRANCE 303

If it no longer represents the haven of refuge I thought, it has at least inspired me to be ready for her, and I am grateful for the opportunity it has given me for the contemplation of holier things. I would have gone to the church alone, but I wanted first to ask your forgiveness again for dragging you into it."

At that he threw himself on his knees beside the bed, saying brokenly: "It is not you who should ask forgiveness, dear heart. Neither can I ask you to forgive me for letting you come here. Listen while I explain that to you now, for I must. We, Crawford and I, knew that it was here the spiders were to be found. He, Crawford . . ."

She interrupted him falteringly: "I hardly understand. Do you mean that you knew all the time of the connection between this place and the spiders . . . that Haggerty was here waiting for me . . . and yet encouraged me to come?"

"Crawford saved you from Haggerty before," he pleaded. "I had . . . it is little enough excuse, I know . . . his assurance that no actual harm should happen to you. He wanted to rid you entirely of Haggerty and her influence, and . . ."

"Used me as a decoy?" she asked, finishing his statement for him.

"That is an unkind way to express it," he answered, brokenly. "Our object was not only to rid your life for ever of Haggerty's merciless vengeance, but also . . ."

"Why couldn't you tell me . . . prepare me?" she demanded further. "Were you afraid I should lack the courage to do my part to help you?"

"No, not that. Your courage is wonderful. But our only hope of success would be lost if Haggerty, through your thoughts, knew that Crawford was here, and active against her. Can you not believe that I acted from as pure a motive as that which prevented you from telling Sir Philip about the orchid?"

She winced distressfully as he reminded her of that. "Please don't talk of that!" she said.

"You must forgive me for mentioning it," he returned. "Our cases seem to be exactly parallel. Let me only stop you now from throwing yourself into her hands, and I will submit willingly to all the reproaches you heap upon me."

"It is too late for that now," Evelyn replied weakly. "Her preparations are too complete, and . . ."

"They are not," he said. "If you would not accept her evil suggestions with such resignation . . . if you would but keep up your courage to defy her . . . she can do nothing against you. Crawford knew what he was doing, or he would not have let you come here. If Haggerty does not know he is here, he can prevent her from doing you any harm, as he did before. He must be right. This fear of her is nothing but a myth . . . a phantasy!"

"Was it a phantasy that killed my father, my mother, and Sir Philip?" she demanded.

"Perhaps not," he agreed. "But, in your father's case at least, had he taken Crawford's advice, he could have resisted and defied Haggerty. There is yet another hope," he added eagerly. "You have seen Haggerty, and know where she is. Describe where she is, and . . ."

"I cannot do that," Evelyn shattered that hope. "I have been there in spirit, but I cannot point the direction. It may be near, and it may be far. The flight of the spirit is much quicker than the progress of the body. It is useless to discuss it further," she added, while her words stabbed him as red-hot irons. "I have no hope of your success against her, but I will do my part, and, if I can, show you where she is. We must hurry if I would go to the church to pray while consciousness remains. Already I feel that weakness returning, and . . ."

Vyvyan waited to hear no more. There was still the hope that if he once got her inside the cathedral, some providence would intervene. It was but the mere vestige of a hope, but it was all he had.

He hastened from the room, and sent in Evelyn's maid. He waited outside in the corridor. The cathedral was only a matter of a few steps away, so it was useless to think of summoning a taxi.

CHAPTER XXVI

HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND

WHEN Evelyn joined him she was very pale, and was glad to hold his arm for support. In this way they descended the stairs and left the hotel, without a word being exchanged.

The cool night air appeared to revive her considerably, but they made their way still in silence along the deserted streets to the cathedral. As Evelyn had said—though he wondered where she obtained the information—the cathedral doors were never closed, and, once inside the edifice, Evelyn led the way to the chapel of "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart", as was her custom, and sank upon one of the rude kneeling cushions placed there for worshippers. Vyvyan knelt beside her, and took her hand which she yielded without comment, thrilling him with the contact of her fingers. He wondered if he might read in that simple action that she had forgiven him, but did not dare to ask the question which trembled on his lips.

He tried to comprehend, at first without success, the comfort she might be experiencing, kneeling there, her knees almost in harsh contact with the rough stone floor, for the prayer hassock afforded only meager protection . . . suppli-

HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND 307

cating the Mother of God, whose image, behind the dim, flickering light of the candles, appeared to him impassably cold and irresponsible. Yet presently some of that comfort filtered its way into his own heart, and he prayed with her.

While there, Evelyn never moved from the position she had first assumed. Once or twice a convulsive shuddering seized her, but beyond that she was as immobile as a carved statue. He marveled at this until he felt the warmth gradually receding from her fingers, and almost imperceptibly they lost the clinging touch that proclaimed her consciousness of their contact with his.

Then he ceased to pray!

It was an age while he waited for the next indication of what would happen, though when she finally rose to her feet all doubt was shattered as to the reason for her previous immobility. The church indeed was no sanctuary against Haggerty's hellish influence. His brain was drumming in recantation of his prayers as he followed her to the door, for she was moving with what had the appearance of volition while the victim of that trance-like unconsciousness which was the chief factor of Haggerty's power over her.

So, he believed now, she would have gone in any case, had he adhered to his original plan of preventing her, and in such a condition the danger of resisting her by force was considerable. In such a way had she walked into the fernery at Moatlands Park on the night of Sir Philip's death. So she moved down the nave of the cathedral. With the same mechanical stride she passed through the door which he opened for her, and out again into the night.

Vyvyan looked in every direction for Crawford, but the square and the streets leading into it were deserted. He had no time to peer farther into the shadows, for there was no hesitation in Evelyn's manner once she was outside the cathedral. Somewhere beyond the confines of the houses Haggerty was waiting for her, impelling her advance with relentless hatred. Evelyn was utterly oblivious of his presence. Indeed, her progress was becoming more and more somnambulist. She half stumbled here and there on the rough cobbles of the streets they traversed, and Vyvyan kept one arms ready to protect her from falling, his heart growing heavier with dread at every moment. At each corner where they turned he gave a hurried glance around, hoping to see Crawford and Judge Worthington. Wherever they were, however, they remained concealed from him.

In this way they negotiated numerous thoroughfares, with their quaintly mingled French and German names—through the Rue St. Etienne, the Friedrichstrasse and the Boulevard Bruges. They met no one, not even a chance pedestrian. They might have been walking through a dead city, with every step ringing on the cobblestones and awakening ghastly echoes.

As they emerged on one occasion from the shadows into the light of the moon, Vyvyan saw that her eyes were closed. She was walking entirely by intuition, or under the directing hand of that unseen power, never once showing hesitation as she changed her direction from time to time, although he was convinced that she had never been in this section of the city

HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND 309

before—a section becoming more and more squalid as they got beyond the business and better-class residential thoroughfares. At the crossing of l'Etoile Pointue, Evelyn turned abruptly into the Rue Gaspard, which from its appearance might be the habitation of the underworld of Rheims, but which led presently into the open country.

Surely now he would see something of Crawford, Vyvyan thought, as Evelyn continued to walk straight ahead after the outskirts of the city had been reached. But there was no sign of him then, nor as they pursued their way for about a mile, until they were beyond even the scattered houses. Here Evelyn turned again, this time into a lane leading to a small, isolated farmhouse, pausing only for a moment as a barred gate obstructed their passage.

Her eyes were still closed as Vyvyan opened this for her!

He felt his heart throbbing with sickening expectancy as he concluded that this was her destination. Still no sign of Crawford. It was an effort to strangle a desire to shout his friend's name, and he only refrained from fear of startling Evelyn, who was already making her way across the field towards a distant copse such as she had described so accurately.

Neither could there be any further doubt that this was the place, for the light of the moon shone upon masses of the gossamer webs of the migrating spiders, which appeared to connect every blade of grass, giving to the meadow the appearance of a frosted sea. Here and there, too, tangles of the web became detached, and were carried away by the light

breeze that was blowing. He caught a bunch of the web in his hand. Almost microscopic spiders were thick upon it.

Evelyn continued her way across the field, with Vyvyan close beside her, not daring to touch her. So far, she could not have become conscious of the tiny insects, though they waded through myriads of them, lifting bunches of web with every step, until Vyvyan was almost blinded by the minute creatures, which were crawling all over him.

On and on they went until they had approached near enough for him to distinguish the scattered trees of the copse ahead. Would they reach the copse before Haggerty showed her hand? Was it again in the shadows that Evelyn had really gone to her in the spirit—those shadows from which Haggerty would materialize to deal the final, crushing blow?

He brushed the spiders from his face, and strained his eyes for the first glimpse of her, his fingers twitching on the revolver he had in his pocket. He had forgotten all about the raven.

Its sudden shrill cry overhead, sending an icy chill down his spine, brought him to an abrupt stop. But he had no time to look for the bird. Evelyn had stopped too, and for the first time raised her hand to brush the tangled web from her face. Everything else save the necessity of watching her, and being ready to act, was cast to the winds. He saw a tremor pass over her as she struggled back to consciousness . . . caught a momentary glance of recognition as her eyes opened; but he waited hardly long enough to see that glance supplemented by a transfixed expression of horror before he gathered her in his arms, and, shielding her with his coat as

HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND 311

best he could, forced the contents of the phial Crawford had given him between her chattering teeth.

She uttered no sound as she swallowed it with difficulty, after which she lay limp in his arms. She was so still that he stooped to glance at her face, lifting his coat slightly to do so. A pallor, as of death, had spread over her features, similar to that which had marked Sir Philip's face as his lips came into contact with the poisonous orchid. Her flickering eyelids alone gave indication of life—a flickering which, however, he had witnessed many times as the precursor of death. Neither could he tell if it was the result of Haggerty's influence, or the effect of the unknown drug he had given her.

Over their heads the raven was circling, filling the air with its raucous cries, occasionally darting towards them, its black, beady eyes shining vindictively in the light of the moon. Crawford had advised him to shoot it, but Evelyn was too heavy in his arms to give him an opportunity to draw his gun.

And where was Crawford? It was strange that he had seen nothing of him. Suppose he had not been on the alert to observe their departure, or was relying entirely on the hypnotic drug he had given him to inject, or the draught which Evelyn had just swallowed!

No, he couldn't believe that. Crawford must be near somewhere, otherwise how could he expect to get Haggerty? But where was he?

It seemed like an age that Evelyn lay apparently lifeless in his arms while the question repeated itself with maddening

persistence. Evelyn was still breathing, that was all . . . so feebly now that he could scarcely discern it. Yet while she breathed she was alive, whatever consolation and hope there was in that. He could feel the warm, though feeble, pulsation of her heart as he held her close, and it stirred again the tingling, passionate yearning for her which had overpowered him on those few occasions when he had held her like that. He stooped lower, and kissed her yearningly, pleading with her to come back to life, and cursing Haggerty in his soul with the full force of his pent-up fury.

Then he rested his lips tenderly on hers, drinking in their clinging fragrance until he imagined they in turn began to grow cold: Never, until then, had he experienced the full agony of suspense. It was hell not to know what her limpness portended. And no sign of Crawford!

He looked around again, but there was no visible sign of life in the meadow, save that of the raven which continued to circle overhead . . . that and the spiders which were too small to be seen easily. Crawford had advised him to shoot the raven, but he did not dare. The shock of the explosion so near to her might have an irreparable effect, fatal perhaps to the faint hope that Evelyn would still live. And he could not understand how Haggerty had been able to inspire the fatal fear, in that short moment when Evelyn's eyes had opened in consciousness. She could hardly have become aware of the spiders.

Perhaps it was the raven! Was that all they were going to see, as if there was some truth in the strange theory of transmigration after all? If not, where was Haggerty? Was

HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND 313

that what Crawford meant when he said, "Shoot the raven! and leave Haggerty to me?" Was he expecting . . ? No, he dismissed these questions as beyond the realms of any possibility. Yet it was strange that Haggerty had not appeared. He wondered if she was still lurking in the shadow of the trees, satisfied with the result of her evil work without the necessity of showing herself.

That thought was answered for him suddenly. From the direction of the trees there came, with piercing intensity, the sounds of raucous, mocking laughter. He looked up quickly to see Haggerty approaching. A lank, disheveled creature, she had broken from the shelter of the copse unobserved, and was already half way from the trees to him.

"Shoot the raven, and leave Haggerty to me!" Crawford had instructed him.

Of what use to leave Haggerty to Crawford, when Crawford had not come! The idea seized him quickly that he would have to finish with Haggerty himself. He shook Evelyn in desperation to see if she were really unconscious. As a response she merely sagged in his arms. It would take more than the noise of a gun to disturb her now.

He steadied her on his left arm, while with his right hand he extracted the revolver from his pocket. He would wait, however, until Haggerty came within accurate shooting distance before taking aim.

At twenty paces he could hear her jeering at him, as he raised his gun at her. She fancied she could read in his hesitation the same impotency as had restrained Sir Philip when he would have struck her with his riding crop in the

hovel off the Enfield-Chestnut highway, and which paralyzed Wilson's finger when he would have shot her in the woods by the lake at Moatlands Park.

"Fool!" she sneered. "Other men have raised weapons of death against me, and I have held them powerless. "Fool! You think you can prevent me from completing my vengeance on the hated spawn of Richard Parkinson. Already you are too late. What you hold in your arms is but the shell of the woman you thought to marry. She is already . . ."

Sir Philip had confronted her at the zenith of her power. Wilson, not knowing that she was still alive, had thought to see a ghost. Neither had the same incentive for ridding the world of her as Vyvyan had . . the destruction of the woman he loved dearer than life itself. No power on earth or in hell could have restrained him. Yet, not because of her words or her spell, his finger halted from functioning upon the trigger.

Neither did she complete what she would have said. Vyvyan's range of vision had changed to a position behind her, where he saw several figures emerge from the trees, Crawford and Judge Worthington leading, and spread out as a fan to cut off any chance of escape for Haggerty. . It was a shout from Crawford that arrested his finger . . the same shout that cut short Haggerty's sentence.

"The raven, Vyvyan! Get the raven first!"

The bird was circling between him and Haggerty. Without further hesitation, before it could take fright at the newcomers, Vyvyan lifted his gun and fired twice at it. His aim was true. The impact of the bullets lifted it bodily several

HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND 315

feet in the air before it fell lifeless among the grasses of the meadow.

Crawford's last shouted command was ringing in his ears. "Get the raven first!" It had perished; even so should perish its evil mistress. Crawford had arrived too late to frustrate her devilish scheme; Crawford's shout had cut off Haggerty's sentence, "She is already dead!" There was no evidence to the contrary from the limp form he held in his arms. Blind with rage, he swung round to empty his gun into the foul creature of hell who had killed her with her sorcery . . in time to see Haggerty fling her arms into the air before she staggered a few paces and fell inert beside the body of her familiar.

As in a daze he saw Crawford run to her, and turn her over. His brain was throbbing so that he hardly heard Crawford's exclamation: "Dead! She's escaped us after all!" What mattered it if she were dead? He had hesitated too long^{er} in shooting the raven . . had given her time to complete her diabolical work. With a dull stupor creeping over his faculties, his finger worked with the trigger of the pistol he held. He was conscious of one thing only . . he had failed, and lost Evelyn! There was nothing left for him to live for; nothing that could wipe out the self-accusation that possessed him. Crawford ran to him as he saw him slowly raising the gun towards himself, and snatched it from his grasp. Vyvyan was too dazed to retain it.

"What has got you?" Crawford demanded.

316 THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS

For answer, Vyvyan half raised the inert, beloved burden on his left arm. Rightly interpreting the gesture, Crawford for a moment looked anxious.

"You gave her the draught?" he asked, almost savagely.

"Yes," Vyvyan said, his words a groan. "But you came too late. Haggerty said . . ."

Crawford was already raising Evelyn's eyelids, and said quickly: "She is only unconscious under the effect of the drug. She is all right."

"You mean . . . ?" Vyvyan stammered incredulously.

"Without the drug, she would have been more frightened, but I don't think mortally so," Crawford answered. "Since that girl confessed to us in the Middlesex Hospital, my opinion of Haggerty's skill as an occultist has materially lessened. Even with Mrs. Parkinson she was afraid to rely entirely upon the inspiration of fear. She resorted to poison. I concluded she would do the same now; neither was I mistaken. Just a minute, and I'll show you."

He crossed to where Haggerty was lying, and came back with a darning needle held cautiously in his fingers. The point of it was covered with a dark, sticky-looking substance.

"That is a subtle poison, beyond a doubt," he explained. "What it is, the analyst will have to discover. What is certain, however, is that Haggerty, fearing recapture, pricked herself with the needle when you shot the raven."

He turned to explain the same thing in French to the Prefect of Police, who had joined him in the ensnaring of Haggerty with several gendarmes. They, with Judge Worthington, were standing over Haggerty's body. When he

HAGGERTY SHOWS HER HAND 317

turned to Vyvyan again, the latter was pressing his lips to those of Evelyn, rejoicing exultantly that he still found their contact moist with returning warmth.

"Let me give her this to drink, and perhaps she will soon speak for herself," Crawford said quietly, rejoicing in the light of happiness in his friend's eyes. Saying which, he forced a draught of a different nature between her lips.

Vyvyan was alone again with her when her eyes did open. The others had gone to meet the farmer to whom the field belonged, and who, disturbed by the noise of the firing, had come to investigate.

"You are safe, darling," Vyvyan breathed huskily to her, as recognition came into her dear eyes. "Haggerty is dead, and . . ."

"I think I know," Evelyn said faintly. "I seemed to feel what was happening. The spiders . . ."

"They are harmless, dear heart," Vyvyan interrupted quickly. He had forgotten them. "They cannot hurt you. You and I have been covered with them for half an hour."

"I don't think I fear them any longer," she said quietly.

Vyvyan restrained his emotion at her words. He wanted to ask her: "Do you love me enough to forgive me for bringing you here, Evelyn?"

To his great joy she answered: "I knew it was the only thing you could do, and . . . don't you know that . . . I have really loved you from . . ."

He did not wait for her to complete then what she would tell him. And the hunger . . . the delight . . . in his heart, which he read in her eyes was reciprocated in hers, was too

precious for words. He strained her yielding form to him, and again pressed his lips upon hers, this time . . the first time . . in unalloyed rapture; and, heedless of the veil or crawling spiders that intermingled with their kiss, their souls united in that felicity which fear of Haggerty only, and Evelyn's determination to sacrifice her love for him, had kept from them until then!



CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

THERE ends the story of Haggerty's vengeance against the House of Parkinson, for her evil spirit never returned to trouble Moatlands Park more. Immediately Crawford and Judge Worthington returned to England, they put the information obtained from Miranda into the hands of Scotland Yard, and Michello was soon traced. Miranda lived long enough to make an affidavit which connected him directly and indisputably as an accomplice in Mrs. Parkinson's death, and he suffered the penalty for his crime.

And there is little more that needs to be told, though it would be grossly unfair to the reader, after allowing him to wade through so much of tragedy and hate, with only brief interludes of love, not to permit him a glimpse of the new happiness that rests over Moatlands Park like a halo . . . a golden halo brilliant as an aurora, which neither sunshine can enhance nor storm cloud mar. The glimpse must be brief, and we crave permission to skip over an interval of three years, of which period much might be written which it is not our purpose to narrate.

Very little change is noticeable in the Park itself since the days when we introduced Richard Parkinson as Lord

of the Manor and County Squire. The ancient elms and oaks still defy the ravages of time and the seasons with their bowels of cement and their girders of steel. Roses still scatter their profuse fragrance in the rose gardens, and purple grapes still grow in abundance in the famous vineyard. The water-fowl may still be seen gobbling their matins upon the peaceful surface of the lake, which placid water is here and there occasionally ruffled by the snouts of those of the giant carp which have, with their years of wisdom, succeeded in eluding the temptations offered them by the members of select piscatorial societies. Only in the silent treetops is there still evidence of the wholesale slaughter which followed Richard Parkinson's edict against the ravens. They have never returned—any of them that escaped. Neither has their place been taken by the hordes of crows which are so common in other manorial parks. There are certainly a few scattered nests of rough twigs in the clumps of trees, and perhaps it is that they have not yet had time to multiply in large numbers.

Once again there is the sound of childhood's joyous laughter by the fountain in the rose gardens. Again a tiny tot affords amusement for himself and his nurse by making frantic efforts to capture with baby fingers the golden carp that come to the surface for crumbs of bread and biscuit.

Yes, this time it is a boy, who later may sign his name "Allan Disston Vyvyan", the first two names given to him by his god-parents in the parish church of St. Albans some eight-months before. And later, if he hears the part that those god-parents performed in bringing his beloved mother and father together, he will be proud of those names, for they

made possible a happiness such as Moatlands Park had not witnessed for years, if ever at all before.

Glancing along the path through the rose gardens, bordered with perennials, perfumed and fragrant, we see those parents halted in their progress towards the clematis bower which is sacred to the memory of Mildred, mother of the present mistress of Moatlands Park. Their steps have been halted by sounds similar to those which arrested the footsteps of Sir Philip many years before, and their hearts throb with delight at the joyous music of their child's laughter.

"Just listen to the little scamp," Vyvyan says proudly to his wife. "Trying to catch those goldfish again, I'll warrant."

Then he added: "If the maker of your family chronicles is right, sweetheart, he has inherited his dear mother's propensity for teasing the venturesome denizens of that pool."

Evelyn laughs happily as she replies: "I have only the said chronicler's word for that. I was too young to remember such incidents myself, and perhaps it is as well he did not see me in all my escapades."

Knowing full well the sadness of her childhood, Vyvyan is unspeakably glad that her present happiness enables her to cast it behind her as something to be forgotten. Without another word they move in the direction of the fountain, and, with arms round each other's waists, happy still in their married courtship, they approach the lawn cautiously, and watch their baby's gambols with tear-brimmed eyes—though with tears of happiness—as Sir Philip, with tears of sorrow, had watched those of Evelyn before.

No shadow of evil hovers over this baby's future happiness, or to mar the present joy of his parents as they watch and rejoice. No spirit of evil will fly overhead, casting shadows of impending danger, though we like to suppose that the spirits of Mildred and Sir Philip are somewhere there, participating in some of that felicity which was denied them upon earth. And perhaps—who knows?—the spirit of Richard Parkinson himself may be watching, gazing with happy, though belated satisfaction, upon this son of his daughter, who, though not a Parkinson in name, is yet a promising heir to the House of Parkinson.

— FINIS —

